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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A DEAD MAN'S SECRET

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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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A Dead Man's Secret;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S SEARCH FOR COUNTERFEIT PLATES.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUNTERFEIT BONDS THAT DISAPPEARED.

Nick Carter was closeted with the chief of the United States Secret Service of the Treasury Department, whose name is known if his face and physique are not, from one end of the country to the other.

Chief Wilkie was seated in his swing-chair at his desk; Nick Carter sat facing him a little distance away, and Conroy Conner was half-reclining upon the leather couch at one side of the room.

In obedience to request from Chief Wilkie, Nick had accompanied Conner back to Washington immediately after the arrest of Scar-face Horton, the forger-counterfeiter, who, with a man named Vinton Potter, had very nearly carried through a criminal deal by which they would have made millions of dollars, and gotten away with it, too.

A stupendous scheme of counterfeiting and forging had been so well under way that the plates were made and the bonds, certificates of stock, and the United States bank-notes were already printed by which they were to float their great venture.

But Scar-face, who had a wholesome respect for Nick Carter, had thought their only safe plan was to get rid of Carter before they went on with their plots, and in attempting to carry out this idea they had fallen down hard.

It had been a part of Scar-face's individual plans to murder his accomplice, Potter, at the last minute, and thus to make all the profit of their scheme for himself, for he believed that he knew exactly where Potter had hidden all the plates and the printed matter. He had carried out a part of his plan; he had murdered Potter, but only to discover, too late, that Potter had changed the hiding-place of the plates, bonds, etc., and therefore that the only man who could have revealed the secret was dead.*

Scar-face Horton's wife, who was known to the world as Mrs. Prime, knew nothing of the secrets of the man she had consorted with, and there was no information to be derived from her, and that was exactly the condition when Chief Wilkie requested the presence of the detective in Washington.

"Nick," the chief was saying, "we have got to find those plates; we have *got* to find them, and that is all there is about it. We *must* have those plates, and the bonds and certificates of stock and the bank-notes that are already printed and in readiness for circulation. If

*See No. 586 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY—"The Shadow."

we do not, the day will come when somebody will find them and put them in circulation."

"I realize that quite thoroughly, chief," replied the detective.

"You see, Nick, I look at it this way: Scar-face, when at liberty, has not his equal in his line in all the world. He never did have his equal, either. The very fact that he has fooled all the detectives all these years, and done it successfully, is sufficient proof of that."

"Surely."

"The very fact that he could make us all believe that he was not only frightfully scarred about his face and one hand, but also that he was lop-sided and lame, and could keep it up as he did it, is proof sufficient of the sort of man he was."

"Yes."

"Now, has it occurred to you that the very men who were assisting him to shadow you were not fools?"

"Well, rather."

"What I mean to say is this: Those men must have known perfectly well that Scar-face had a big deal on hand, and moreover they knew what his big deals amounted to. They knew that Potter was associated with him, and that Potter was the best engraver and the most thorough workman in his line that this country, or any other, ever saw."

"Yes."

"Well, the result of all that is this: That they must have figured out rather correctly about what Horton and Potter were up to. In a word they had sense enough to know that the plates and bonds and money were in existence somewhere, and they know now that we haven't found them."

"They would be fools if they did not; and they are not that."

"Exactly. Well, it all means that they are in the game to find that cache, if it can be done. It means that we will not be the only ones who are looking for the plates and the counterfeit bonds and money, *and it means that we have got to find them first; or they will be sprung on us when we least expect it, and they will get away with the goods.*"

"I see that, also, quite plainly."

"The trouble with our position in the matter, is this: That we do not know *what* has been counterfeited."

"No."

"We know that some bonds, some certificates of stock, and some bank-notes have been counterfeited, but we don't know what bonds, what certificates of stock, or what bank-notes they are; therefore, we are handicapped. We can't stop them, or head them off—and without seeing them at all I know they are so perfect that they would fool an expert in the effort to detect them. The fact that Potter made them is sufficient proof of that."

"Yes; I know."

"When they are found we will discover that they are as good, if not actually better, than the originals. They've got to be found!"

Nick nodded. The chief had made that remark several times already, and he was tired of replying to it.

"It has always been a fancy of mine," pursued the chief, "that your expert criminal would make an excellent detective if you could transform his moral point of view."

"Mine, too."

"Well, in this bond-hunt of ours, then, we have got to take into consideration that there will be three or four, possibly half a dozen, crooks temporarily turned detective, who will be looking for the same things we are searching for. If you and Conner happen to run up against any of them in the search, it will be your lives or theirs, if you get into close quarters."

"I don't think that either of us will lie awake nights over that part of it."

"No; I don't suppose you will. But what I am getting at is this: I have been giving this business a good deal of thought, and I have made up my mind that we three are the only ones who must know anything about it. I am going to leave the handling of the entire case in your hands and Conner's, with occasionally a little personal help from me, if you happen to need it. I don't want another man in the department to know what either of you are on."

"I see."

"So I engage you indefinitely, to devote your energies to the recovery of the things we want. You are on my staff until this case is finished. I'd like to have you on it all the time, if you would come to me, but I know you won't do that; but just now you're my man, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then your assignment and Conner's is that you find those lost plates and all the counterfeits that have been made from them, and deliver them to me. My warning to you both is: Beware of the other fellows who will be looking for them. Now, tell me what you know about it, and let us see if we can figure out some sort of plan of procedure."

"All that I know about it," replied Nick, "is what I overheard Horton say to Potter, in a conversation between them about the affair. I gathered from that conversation that Scar-face believed that he could clean up millions by the deal. I think the stuff was to be floated all over the world at the same time—sprung at about the same moment everywhere."

"I see."

"Horton's idea of the thing was to spring all the traps at once, have them all sold out, practically the same day, clean up, and disappear. The counterfeits would be so scattered that it would require two or three years, or

perhaps more, before the size of the deal would be suspected, or before any of it could be traced. His plan after that——"

"I don't care anything about his plans after that."

"Well, they may be significant, for all that. His plan after that was to go to Italy, and to purchase a patent of nobility there. He could have done that. His dark skin and general appearance would have helped him out in the idea, and by the time we were well on his track he would practically have disappeared."

Wilkie nodded.

"You see, he had no acquaintances outside of Potter and a few of his cronies, who knew him when he was not disguised as Scar-face—and even they knew very little."

Wilkie nodded again.

"I gathered from that same conversation that Potter and Scar-face had worked together in perfect accord up to the time when everything was in readiness, and that then, when Potter went away by himself to do the last act of the affair—that is, to get the bonds and cash in actual readiness for circulation, he suspected Horton enough to take everything to a new hiding-place."

"That was smart of him."

"In that way, he had a hold on Horton. He had no more reason, he supposed, to fear him, for his confederate certainly would not harm him so long as he had the goods hidden where Horton could not find them."

"But Horton did kill him, after all."

"Yes; because he thought he had discovered that hiding-place."

"I have been thinking considerably about that, too, Nick. Suppose that, after all, Horton does know where those plates and bonds are?"

"I don't suppose it for an instant. If he did know, now, he would be ready to make some sort of a deal with us to give them up and to get himself, partly, at least, out of the hole he is in. As it stands now, he has nothing but the electric chair ahead of him."

"Still, Nick, it is barely possible that he has a fairly good idea of where those plates are hidden."

"I don't think so. I don't believe he has any more idea about it than we have. I cannot see it in that way."

"Then why should he have murdered Potter? If he was not positive in his own mind that he knew where they were, how did he dare to kill Potter?"

"He *thought* he knew."

"But he has had no chance since that time to prove to himself that he does *not* know."

"Well, I don't expect to make you come around to my opinion, so if you want to waste time fooling with Horton, go ahead and do it. As for me, if I am to search for the plates and bonds, I shall not give a thought to Scar-face Horton; and if he offered to deal with me this minute I would laugh at him."

CHAPTER II.

THE PLAN TO LIBERATE A MURDERER.

"You see, chief," the detective continued, after a short pause, "the whole matter developed really out of nothing at all. I don't know whether Conner has told you anything about it, or not."

"No; he has not. I would like to hear it."

"Well, it happened that both my assistants were away from home, are now, in fact. It also happened that I was enjoying a little leisure, and was congratulating myself accordingly."

"Rather an unusual thing for you, Nick."

"Yes. I suddenly became possessed with the idea that somebody was shadowing me, and yet there were two weeks when, although I was mentally certain of it, I could not catch the shadow at work. I couldn't spot him, or any of them, rather, for it turned out that there were many."

"That is the way they fooled you, I suppose."

"Yes. There were over a dozen of them. They would change off every few minutes, and I had nothing to tie to. But, finally, I sent for Conner."

"I remember."

"We put our heads together and fixed up a scheme by which we would discover who it was that was on my track. You see, all this time I couldn't fix upon any motive that they might have for shadowing me."

"Why?"

"I argued that if it were done by enemies who wanted to put me out of the way they had had plenty of opportunity to do it several times already. I couldn't get at the motive."

"But you did get at it, finally?"

"Yes. It was only Horton's thorough way of doing things. He had determined to murder me, but he was watching for an opportunity to do it when he could not only cover his own tracks thoroughly, but when he could also bring the actual crime home to some one else, that he could never be suspected."*

"He didn't want anything in the way to his calm enjoyment of the millions, once he got his hands on them, eh?"

"No; and I have always thought—I think so still—that he intended later on to murder, one by one, every person who was in his secret. And he would have done it on the same thorough plan, too."

"I've no doubt of it."

"It was a very great plan that he had, judged from his standpoint. He had been figuring on it for years, but until he ran across Potter there was no way for him to carry it out. You see, it could not be done, as he wished it done, unless the work of counterfeiting was perfect, and Potter was the only man who was perfect in that

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 586.

line. If he had not foolishly thought it important that he get me out of the way first, he might have been floating those bonds by this time."

"I am not so sure that he was foolish, Nick. You know you are one of the kind that never lets go, once you've got a grip on anything. Horton knew that. He knew, moreover, that as soon as the department discovered what was doing, I would send for you. It is true that in my regular routine work here I believe I would have traced him out and caught him sooner or later, but with my facilities, and with the multitude of things I have to look after all the while, he really did not have a hundredth part as much to fear from me, with all my men, as from you. No; he was wise about that part of it. He could never have succeeded with you on his track, while, on the other hand, he at least believed that he could do it with you out of the way."

"Well, anyhow, it was that which was his undoing."

"And now we are stared in the face by the proposition that somewhere, carefully hidden away, there are millions of dollars' worth of counterfeit bonds that are negotiable; I do not mean all the bonds, of course, but several million dollars' worth of bonds, cash, and certificates all readily negotiable."

"Yes."

"And that with them, or hidden in another place, which is likely, by the way, there are the plates from which the bonds, the certificates, and the notes were made, and from which as many more millions could be readily made, in the hands of persons who know how."

"Precisely."

"And I know mighty well, Nick—as well as I know anything at all—that if one of these bills were passed to-day over the counter at the window of a receiving-teller, he would accept it without a question; because I know Potter's work. It was perfect."

"Yes."

"And we do *not* know what those counterfeits are. I know I have said it before, but that is what sticks in my crop. If we only knew——"

"But we do not, chief, so what is the use in dwelling on that point?"

"Well, it is up to you and Conner. I think you two will run the thing to earth, but I confess that I haven't an idea how you will accomplish it. What do you think about it, Con?"

"I don't know, chief. I am going to play second fiddle in this case. I'm going to act as Nick's assistant. One of us has got to be boss, and I shall leave that delicate task to him."

"Now, Nick," said the chief, "is there anything more I can do for you, except to state that you will not be limited as to expense, and that I want you to do your best?"

"No. That's all."

"Wait just a minute, Nick," said Conner. "An idea occurs to me right here that I would like to talk over in the presence of the chief, if you don't mind."

"Well, what is it?"

"You haven't forgotten that chap Selim, have you?"

"He was Horton's confidential man, you know."

"Yes."

"And a sly fellow, too."

"Who is Selim?" asked the chief.

"He is a Syrian, chief, but he was born in Madagascar, it seems. He is a dark-skinned, swarthy individual, who commits murders because he enjoys it. In his travels somewhere he found the deadly blow-gun and the poisoned dart, and improved upon both of them. It was one of his poisoned darts that Horton used to kill Potter. The Syrian had made use of one of them the preceding night to murder an accomplice of Horton's whom Selim wanted out of the way. His name was Jack Seabright. Selim is now in jail for that murder, and I happen to know that he has not been told of the arrest of his master."

"Well, Con, what is your idea about it all?"

"It is rather vague, but it is this: It occurred to me that it might not be a bad idea to let Selim escape. He is a bad man to let loose on the community, I know; but the fact remains that he was confidential man for Horton, and to a certain extent for Potter, also. I believe that if there is any man on the outside—I mean other than those two, Potter, who is dead, and Horton, who is as good as dead—who could make a shrewd and approximately correct guess about those plates, it would be Selim."

"Wouldn't he make use of the first moment of his liberty in getting in with the others of the gang, whom we don't know, but who will be searching for the treasure?"

"Possibly, but I don't think so. But even if he did, we would have something to tie to."

"How so?"

"Well, I think I would engage not to lose track of Selim."

"Do you really suppose that he knows anything about the hiding-place of the plates and the other things?"

"No, I do not; but he did know, and does know, about the haunts of those two men. I think that he could make a shrewder guess than anybody else as to where the goods *might* be hidden."

"There may be something in your suggestion, Con."

"I think there is."

"Do you suppose that the authorities up there would be willing to assist you to the end of permitting Selim to make his escape?"

"That is the point. I don't think they would—unless *you* should ask it."

"Oh, I see."

"That is why I wished to discuss it a moment before we left here."

"What do you think about it, Nick?" asked the chief.

"I hardly know. It is both a good suggestion and a bad one."

"Do you think that the man at liberty might be of benefit to the speedier conclusion of the case?"

"Just give me a minute before I reply to that question, will you?"

He rose and crossed over to the window, where he stood for some time. When he returned to his chair, he was smiling.

"I have decided," he said.

"Well, what is your decision?"

"I think if you will make the arrangement yourself to let him escape—that if you will take the trouble to go to New York, and do it personally—it will be a good thing. I have thought out a way in which Selim can be of use to us."

"But what is the use of my going all the way to New York, Nick?"

"Because I want it done—if it is done at all—in a certain way."

"How long do you propose to detain me in New York?"

"Only a few hours. Just long enough to go to headquarters and make all the arrangements."

"I can do that, I guess. I can go with you on the midnight train to-night."

"That will answer finely."

"What is your plan?"

"I would rather not tell it just at present, if you are willing to wait till we get to New York."

"Oh, it makes no difference. It is settled, then. We will meet at the Union Station for the Pennsylvania midnight train, eh?"

"Yes."

"And I can be back here to-morrow evening?"

"Sure."

"Then you'll have to excuse me for a while now. Good luck to you, fellows."

As Conner and Nick left the chief's office together, and as soon as they were outside, the former said to the detective:

"What is the bee you have got in your bonnet now?"

"It is a good one, Con; a dandy, I think. That is, it will be if Selim is really worth the powder we are about to expend on him. I am not so sure as to that."

"I am not sure, either. But I have had it in my nut all along that Selim was a great deal wiser than we thought, and was much closer to Horton's and Potter's secrets than we have imagined."

"He might be that, and still have no idea where those plates are hidden."

"I don't for a moment believe that he knows where they are; what I do think is that he will know better where to search for them than we would."

"I shouldn't wonder if you are right about that, Con."

"And, that being the case, he may prove invaluable to us."

"We can no more than try it, anyway."

"Correct; and we will do it."

CHAPTER III.

THE ESCAPE OF THE SYRIAN.

When the chief of the Secret Service applied at headquarters in New York the day following to secure the liberation of Selim, he at first met with considerable opposition, but after he had argued the matter for a while, it was agreed that, with the connivance of the District Attorney, it might be arranged; and so the chief went there.

It need only be said that he finally got his way, and then, in accordance with a plan already outlined by Nick Carter, a letter was passed into the prison, and ultimately found its way to Selim, which read—and in the Syrian language, too:

"You have friends here among your countrymen who have taken an interest in your case. You may not know who they are now, but it is sufficient that they believe they have found a way to assist you out of your troubles. If you will follow the directions of this letter, you may be free very early this evening.

"We have learned—and our information is derived from a source that we know is correct—that you are to be taken from your cell late this afternoon, and from there conveyed to the headquarters of police, where you are to be subjected to a rigid cross-examination about the plans of the man you served.

"Two officers will conduct you from your cell to the place of destination—that is, toward the place of destination. As the distance is not long, you will walk. There will be an officer on either side of you, and you will be handcuffed to the one on your left.

"Your way will lie directly up Centre Street. Just before you arrive in front of Backapolo's Greek restaurant, which is near Canal Street, four men will rush upon the officers who have you in charge. They will attack and knock down the officer on your right, and will pretend to serve the one on your left in the same manner; but don't forget that he is your friend, and is aiding you.

"He will not have locked the handcuff on his own wrist, and so, when the attack occurs, you are to wrench yourself free from him, and this will be accomplished by his releasing the iron from his own wrist.

"You will then leap into the hallway that is at the right hand of the restaurant door, and you will find awaiting

you there a man who will lead you to a secure place of hiding; and once you are there all this will be explained to you.

"A signature to this letter is not necessary.

"Do as you are told."

Selim was greatly astonished at the receipt of this letter. He could not imagine from whence it had come. He was not aware that he had friends in the city, at all.

His naturally suspicious nature was at first inclined to view the letter with distrust.

In his own country it was not an unusual thing to let people attempt to escape and to shoot them down when they were doing so; he thought for a moment that this was what had been fixed up for him.

But his reason told him better than that.

He knew that things were not done in that manner in New York, and he was compelled to the belief that the letter was genuine.

Accordingly, he read it through several times, until he had thoroughly mastered the directions that were given inside, and then he tore it into bits, and chewed the bits into a pulp.

After that he began the business of waiting, and if any one of the readers has ever waited with anything like the same anxiety that Selim felt then he may understand that with each passing moment the Syrian became more and more convinced that the door of liberty was opening before him.

His impatience became almost unbearable as the moment drew near when the officers must come after him, if, indeed, the whole thing were not a cruel hoax.

He began, finally, to believe that it was one.

Who in the world would take an interest in him, when he was in such a place, and if they did take the interest, what was the reason?

He had no friends in the city, even among his own countrymen. He knew of nobody who would take such an enormous risk for him. He began to despair. He could not believe the thing to be true.

And then, suddenly, men appeared at the door of his cell.

The grated door was unlocked and opened, and he was told to step outside.

"What are you going to do with me?" he demanded, pretending to hesitate, although he was suddenly elated with the truth of the letter.

"You will find out soon enough," was the answer. 'Come on out uh there!"

He stepped through the doorway, and at once he was led along the gallery to the stairs, thence down them, and finally into the warden's office, where he was handcuffed to one of the men who had brought him out, and told to go along with the two.

One man walked on his right, as a guard; he was handcuffed to the man on his left. The letter was at least correct, so far; but Selim found himself wondering now if the men might not decide to ride, instead of walk, and in that case, his opportunity would be lost.

But, outside the prison, one of his guards—the man on his left, too, said:

"Maybe you would like a little exercise, after being shut up in there, Selim; eh?"

"Yase; eef you are so good," he replied eagerly. "I should like to walk."

"What do you say, Bob?" the guard asked of the other one. "Shall we walk?"

"Sure, if you want to. It makes no difference to me. I'd rather walk than bother to get on and off a car with this cuss here."

"Then, come on."

And so the walk began, and in silence, save for a desultory conversation that was half-kept up between the two guards.

When the vicinity of Canal Street was reached, Selim began to look about him eagerly, for the Greek restaurant that had been described in the letter, and, presently, he saw it.

It was on the same side of the street with them, also, and of this the Syrian was grateful. He smiled to think to himself that the prophecies of his unknown friends were working out exactly as they said.

It was just upon the edge of darkness; not night yet, neither was it daylight.

As the three approached the restaurant, Selim saw some men issue from the hallway beside it, and he felt that these were the ones who were about to rescue him, and braced himself for the ordeal through which he would presently have to pass.

He wondered if, at the last moment, some near-by policeman would spoil it all by happening upon the scene too soon, and in his own heathenish way he prayed that this might not be so.

Twenty yards more, and they were almost abreast of the restaurant, and then the long-expected thing happened. Indeed, it had seemed very long, indeed, to Selim.

The men who had come out of the hallway made a sudden rush forward; it looked to Selim as if a terrific blow landed upon the head of the man who was guarding him on the right, and the Syrian saw him pitch forward and fall.

Then the man on his left seemed, also, to be struck heavily, and he fell; and as he did so Selim recalled his instructions, to wrench himself free, if he could.

He gave a terrific jerk, and the handcuff came loose from the wrist of the guard and dangled from the one that was locked around his own; and then, perceiving that he was free, and that both officers who had had him in charge were sprawling upon the pavement, he gave

an exultant cry of victory, and dashed toward the now open door of the hallway beside the restaurant.

In an instant he had passed through it and closed the door behind him.

Then, in the darkness, he felt himself seized, and a voice whispered to him in his own language:

"Follow me."

He felt that other person seize the now dangling handcuff and with it guide him through the darkness to the rear of the building. In the yard they found where a ladder had been placed against the fence, and they climbed over this and dropped into the adjoining yard; and so they made their way over several fences, and finally into another building, which fronted upon a different street; through this to the street itself, and there, against the curb, they found a hack in readiness for them.

Selim's guide shoved him into it and leaped in after him, banged the door shut, and pulled the curtains so they were in complete darkness.

Then it was that Selim found his tongue. Speaking in his own language, he asked:

"Who are you, please, and why have you done this for me?"

"Hush!" was the reply. "You will be told all about it presently. Just now there is not time."

"Very well; but, at least, tell me who you are."

"No. Not yet. Wait."

"But where are you taking me?"

"You will soon find that out. You must not talk, I tell you."

And so Selim was compelled to be patient, but after a considerable ride the carriage stopped, and his guide said to him:

"When we get out, if you see anything that surprises you, hold your tongue and wait."

"I will obey," replied Selim.

Then the guide opened the door, whispering as he did so:

"Hold your head down now, and keep your eyes upon the pavement. Bend your head a little forward, so that in case there is anybody near us, they will not be able to describe your appearance. Lean on me as if you were ill, and keep your head down."

Selim obeyed, and presently he was led up a flight of front steps that he would instantly have recognized had he been using his eyes, for he had watched outside of them many times during the last weeks for the appearance of Nick Carter on the street.

They were entering Nick Carter's house, although he had no idea of it.

It was better than blindfolding him, this making him think that there might be somebody on the watch who would remember his appearance and describe it.

He was led up-stairs then to a room that Nick had determined to make use of temporarily, before he put Selim into the strong-room at the top of the house, and there he was told to wait a moment.

He waited some little time, with the handcuffs still dangling from his wrist. He looked at it ruefully, and wished that his friend would hasten to remove it. He did not like the appearance of it at all, and he did not feel that he was quite free so long as it was there.

Presently, however, the door opened, and apparently another one of his own countrymen entered the room.

This one was seemingly a very old man, although to Selim he was unmistakably a Syrian.

Poor Selim could not guess that it was the same man who had brought him there in the hack; and it was far, very far indeed from his imagination to suppose that either—in fact, that both of these men were one and the same, and that person Nick Carter himself.

Nick began at once in the cracked voice of a very old man, keeping his body bent the better to carry out the deception he was practising.

"My son," he said, "you have been brought here to me out of very great danger; is it not so?"

"Yes, noble sir," was the stilted reply.

"Then, perhaps, in recognition of what has so far been done for you, and of other comforts that you will still receive, you will be perfectly frank with me."

"Frank with you? About what, father?"

"About a certain matter concerning which I would question you."

"Very well, sir; let me hear what it is. But, first, please remove this handcuff."

CHAPTER IV.

AN EFFORT TO LOCATE THE PLATES.

Nick Carter pretended not to hear this last request; at least, he paid no attention to it.

"My son," he said, dropping upon a chair and signifying to Selim to do the same, "you were arrested three days ago for having shot a poisoned dart into the body of a man who was at the time departing from the doorway of the Hotel Mammoth. The result of that poisoned dart was that the man died almost instantly. It appears, we are told, that you held no personal animosity against the man you killed, but that you did it upon the order of another—on the order of a man whose name is Anthony Prime. Am I so far correct?"

"You evidently know you are," replied Selim, who did not fancy having his misdeeds recalled to him so coolly.

"I am told, also," continued Nick, in the voice of an old man, and a Syrian at that, "that you have been a long time in the employ of the man on whose order you acted. Is that also true, my son?"

"Yes; but what the——"

"Patience; patience; unless it is your wish to be returned to the prison cell from which you have just miraculously escaped."

"I have no such wish. You should be assured of that, patriarch."

"I am. I am. Hence I question thee. Now——"

"Well, patriarch?"

"It has come to my knowledge and to the knowledge of those who are associated with me in your rescue today, that the man Prime possessed wonderful properties."

"Possessed? What do you mean by possessed? Does he not possess them now."

"No. Or, if he does, they will not avail him. He murdered another man by the name of Potter and——"

"What's that?"

"I did but tell you, Selim."

"Did Prime kill Potter?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By the use of one of your own instruments, that you supposed only you knew how to handle—he did it with one of your blow-guns."

"Swear to that, patriarch!"

"I do swear to it."

"And where is Prime now?"

"He is even in the same prison from which you have just escaped."

"Is that the truth, sir?"

"It is the truth, Selim."

"Is there proof that he did it?"

"He was taken in the commission of the act. There is ample proof."

"Then he will have to suffer for it, won't he?"

"Most certainly—unless he is rescued."

"Unless he is rescued; what do you mean, patriarch?"

"Would you like to see him at liberty again?"

"No."

"Then it is for you to answer the questions I wish to ask. If you will not answer them, it may be that terms will have to be made with Prime himself, and that you will be returned to the prison while he goes free. Do you understand?"

"You make it plain enough."

"Will you answer?"

"Tell me first what the questions are."

"I have stated already that Prime is known to us to have possessed wonderful properties which he owned conjointly with the man Potter. Potter being now dead, killed by Prime, the properties naturally revert to Prime; but Prime being the same as dead, since he must go to the electric chair for the murder of Potter, the properties have no owner. We—that is, I and the friends who are associated with me—have decided that we wish to own those properties, only we do not know where they are hidden away. Now, do you know to what properties I have been referring?"

"I suppose I do."

"Do you, or do you not?"

"Do you mean the plates and the money and other things those two had manufactured?"

"Yes."

"That is what I supposed."

"Well, you know, do you not, that Potter hid those things away so that Prime could not find them?"

"I know that he thought he did; out I found out where they were, and told Prime. He was to give me a fortune for telling him, but now I know that he meant to betray me into the hands of the authorities, in order that he would not have to pay me. I believe that Prime sent me out to kill Seabright in order that he might have me arrested at once."

"We think that he was quite capable of such treachery," replied Nick, as the old man.

"Oh, I know it only too well, patriarch."

"Did you know, when you were sent out to kill Seabright, that Potter had changed the hiding-place of the plates and other things?"

"Yes. I was awaiting an opportunity to tell Prime about it. I could not do it while Potter was there. Then he sent me to throw the dart into Seabright, and when I returned Potter was still there. Then they had some secrets to talk which they did not wish me to overhear, and Prime made an excuse to get rid of me. If he had made an excuse to get rid of Potter instead, I should have told him that the hiding-place had been changed."

"And also what and where the new hiding-place was and is?"

"No. I could not have told him that."

"Why not?"

"Because I did not know."

"You only knew that the hiding-place had been changed?"

"That is all."

"How did you know that?"

"Because I had been there to see."

"Confess that you went there to take some of the counterfeit in order that you might have it to spend, and that it was so that you discovered that a change had been made."

"Well, I may as well confess it. It can do no harm now."

"No. So you did go to the hiding-place to take some of the money, did you? And in going there discovered that Potter had removed everything to another place?"

"Yes, patriarch."

"Did you search for the new hiding-place?"

"I had no time to do so."

"Would you have searched for it if you had had the time?"

"Most certainly."

"Do you think that you might have found it?"

"How can I answer that? I do not know."

"Have you reason to suppose that you might have succeeded?"

"I found the other hiding-place; why not this one."

"Do you suppose that you could find it now?"

"I could try."

"Could you direct me so that I could look for it as well as you?"

"I don't know about that. Perhaps you haven't the nose for searching out things that I have got."

"Possibly not. Where was the old hiding-place? The one from which Potter removed the plates and other things?"

"The strangest place in the world; but you would not understand that part of it if I should tell you."

"Try me and see if I would not."

"It can do no harm now that Prime's play is over, patriarch. You have not guessed that Anthony Prime was not always Anthony Prime, have you?"

"Yes. I have guessed it. I know that at times he was a man with a terrible scar on his face and on the back of one of his hands; that at such times his shoulder drooped and one foot dragged behind him; that then he was known as Scar-face Horton."

Selim was gazing at his supposed countryman in undisguised admiration.

"Well, you are much wiser than I supposed," was his comment. "I think, patriarch, that I will serve you, if you will use me right. You are a smarter man than I am."

"Thank you, my son. Now where was the old hiding-place that you were about to describe?"

"I don't know what good it will do you to know, but——"

"It may give me an idea as to the new one he would select."

"It was in the home where Prime's wife lived. It was practically in her care. She was known as——"

"As Mrs. Horton. Yes; I know. You say the stuff was there until Potter removed it?"

"Yes."

"And when did he remove it? That is, when did you go to get some of the counterfeit money that was there, and discover it was gone?"

"During the forenoon of the day before I was arrested."

"When was the last time before that that you knew the stuff was still safe at the house? Will you tell me that?"

"It was only twenty-four hours earlier."

"Ah! Then I am to understand that you had already abstracted some of the money?" In asking this question, Nick earnestly hoped that the reply would be in the affirmative, for then he would have a fairly good clue to the identity of the bills that had been counterfeited. But he was doomed to disappointment in this.

"No," replied Selim. "I went there to take some, but I was frightened, and did not do it. I came away empty handed."

"And returned the following day with more courage, eh?"

"Yes."

"What were the denomination of the bills? Do you remember that much?"

"Not clearly, patriarch. There were all kinds. There were some ten-thousand-dollar bills, there were thousand-dollar bills, hundred-dollar bills—there were all kinds."

"You do not, I suppose, remember anything more about them, do you?"

"Nothing."

"And the bonds; do you recall what they were?"

"No; I hadn't any use for them. I did not know what they were."

"And the other things?"

"Prime called them certificates of stock. That is all I know about them. I barely looked at them and the bonds. But I say, what do I get out of all this if I assist you to find what you want?"

"We have not arrived at the point of making terms as yet. For the present, content yourself with the knowledge that you are not now in prison. For the future—we will see."

"Aren't you going to take this iron off my wrist, patriarch?"

"Surely; surely; come hither."

CHAPTER V.

THE THIRTEEN BOXES.

The detective calmly produced a key from one of his pockets and unlocked the handcuff; then he cast it aside with a shrug of his shoulders, and he smiled when he heard Selim give a sigh of relief.

"You feel better now?" he asked, still smiling.

"Yes. I did not feel free as long as that was on my wrist."

"Probably not; but you feel better now?"

"Yes."

"Where do you suppose, at a guess, that Potter would have concealed the plates and other things when he took them away from the custody of Mrs. Horton?"

"Indeed, I do not know."

"And you have no idea?"

"None whatever."

"Do you suppose that a day or two of rest and uninterrupted thought on the subject would assist you in thinking out a place where they might be hidden?"

"I don't understand you. What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that, although you are no longer in prison, you must still remain here where you are until we find those plates and bonds and other things."

"Do you mean that although I have escaped from prison that I am now your prisoner?"

"In effect—yes. We cannot afford to let you go quite free, at least until we have found the plates and other property, for fear that you would begin a search for them, and, finding them, would say that we had no right to them. You see we want them very badly."

"So liberating me was only part of a plot on your part to get those plates, was it?"

"Precisely, my son. You have guessed correctly."

"Suppose that I cannot help you find the bonds, are you going to send me back to prison?"

"We will discuss that when we are satisfied that you cannot help us, Selim."

"I don't see, then, that I am any better off than I was before."

"Oh, yes you do."

"How so?"

"Before, you had a narrow cell and no comforts. You could not rest; you could not keep comfortably clean. Your food was plain and common. But now you will have a comfortable room at your disposal, a good bed, plenty to eat, all the water you require, and a tumbler of red wine with your dinner. Is it not a change for the better?"

"Yes; but I would rather go free."

"What? To be immediately captured again? You are foolish."

"I don't think they would capture me again, patriarch."

"Bah! Within three hours you would be back again in prison—in your cell."

"Maybe so."

"We know it. Here, where you are, is by far the safest place for you at present. Here no one will find you. Here you have undisturbed opportunity for thought about that hiding-place, and if you have the wit to remember it, or to think out the secret of where it is located, you will be made very happy, eventually."

"Humph. I don't know. I would rather that I were allowed to be entirely free."

"Yes. I have no doubt of it. And being free you would search for the things we want, and if you found them you would disappear, and we would have liberated you for nothing."

"I swear patriarch——"

"Don't swear, at least to me, for your oaths would be as the breeze that blows among the trees—in fact, not so stable."

"Whose house is this, patriarch?"

"Mine."

"How many people have you here?"

"Enough to overpower a dozen such as you if it became necessary; but it would not be necessary, for I could do it alone. Stretch out your right hand a moment. I will show you something which will lead you not to think of overpowering me. Stretch it out, I say!"

The command was spoken so sharply that Selim obeyed it before he thought, and the next instant his hand was seized in a grip that made him cry out with pain, and which finally brought him to his knees with tears in his eyes.

Holding him there, the detective said:

"Swear now that you will make no effort to escape as long as I keep you here. Swear!"

"I swear. I swear it, patriarch."

"It is good. Resume your seat again. Now let us see if we cannot work out something about this secret hiding-place. How well did you know Potter?"

"As well as I did Prime."

"Which of the two did you like the better?"

"Like? I never liked anybody in my life. I hate everybody; but I would sooner have trusted myself to Potter than to Prime."

"Why?"

"Potter would keep his word with you if he gave it. Prime would do so only if it pleased him."

"Then why did you prefer to serve Prime?"

"Because Prime always had money. He knew how to get it. Potter was simple-minded as compared to Prime."

"I have no doubt of that. Did you know that Prime meant to kill Potter?"

"No; I wouldn't have stood for that."

"Why?"

"Potter was the goose that laid the golden egg. Prime killed it, and killed himself, too, when he murdered Potter."

"You spoke truth there. Has Potter ever talked confidentially with you?"

"Many times."

"Then if you were free now, and could search for the plates without fear, where would you look for them?"

"I don't know where, only on general principles."

"What do you call general principles?"

"I mean that I would search for places where a man would seem the least likely to hide anything. I can give you an illustration, if you like."

"Do so."

"I heard a man tell once of a train-robbery in the Western part of this country, where the robbers did not

content themselves with robbing the express-car, they went through the passenger-coaches. There was one man there who had twenty thousand dollars in bills in a pocketbook. He was reading a newspaper when he heard the shots, and knew that the train had been stopped by robbers. As quick as thought he took the money from his pocketbook—all but one one-hundred-dollar bill. He left that where it was—he removed the money from his pocket, placed it within the folds of the paper, crumpled the paper in his hands, and threw it on the floor of the car. Then he put his feet on it and wiped the paper around the floor. When the robbers went through his car, they got his silver watch and the hundred-dollar bill, but they did not find the nineteen thousand, nine hundred dollars that was on the floor, under their noses. Do you see what I mean, patriarch?"

"Yes."

"If I should begin now to look for something that Potter has hidden, I would look about directly under my nose for it."

"Selim, that is excellent advice as far as it goes. Now I want you to think out the most likely places that are directly under our noses. You knew Potter; where did he live?"

"He didn't live anywhere."

"I don't understand you. He must have lived somewhere."

"No; he did not. He was bald-headed, and only needed a small comb for his scanty hair. He carried that and a tooth-brush in his pocket. When a collar or any other linen was soiled, he threw it away and bought new. It was the same with all his clothing. When he wanted sleep he went to a hotel—never twice close together to the same one—took a room, paid for it in advance, and went to bed. He was a bird of passage always."

"I see. So he kept no room of his own, where he could have hidden the things?"

"No."

"Where did he do the work of the engraving?"

"Nobody, not even Prime, ever knew that, save that it was somewhere in the mountains—a hundred miles from New York."

"Could he have hidden them there where he did the engraving?"

"No. It was too far away. He had not had the time to do that."

"Do you know where the place was?"

"It was in a State that is called Vermont."

"That is more than a hundred miles from here."

"It is no matter. It is all the same to me."

"Do you remember the name of the town where he went?"

"Yes. Prime received a letter from him once when he was there. I had an opportunity to read it, and I did so."

"Where was the letter from?"

"A place called Landgrove."

"Do you think that he could still have left those things in the care of Mrs. Horton?"

"No. You have no idea of the weight of them all."

"Oh, yes I have. The plates would be very heavy indeed. The bonds, if there were many of them, would also be heavy; and the certificates of stock. Paper, especially that kind, is very heavy. When you saw the stuff, how was it packed?"

"In small but solid boxes, that long"—he measured off about two feet with his hands—"and that wide." He measured off eight or nine inches this time.

"How many boxes were there in all?"

"Thirteen."

"What? So many?"

"Thirteen—yes."

"Were they of about the same weight?"

"I think so."

"How much should you say that each box would weigh?"

"Twenty-five or thirty pounds."

"So there was approximately five hundred pounds in all."

"Yes."

"He couldn't carry that around in a hand-bag."

"Not very well; no, sir."

"And he must have found a hiding-place for it very quickly, since it was only twenty-four hours after you had seen all the stuff together when you discovered that it was gone."

"Yes. But there is another thing that you forget, patriarch."

"What is that?"

"At least half of the time during the twenty-four hours to which you just referred, I am sure that I know where Potter was, and he was not handling those boxes then. Take it all together, there were only between five and six hours that he could have devoted to changing the hiding-place."

"Then, Selim, we ought to be able to find them."

"I think so, patriarch."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S UNEXPECTED CALLER.

It was ten o'clock that evening before the detective rejoined Conner in the study.

He had pumped Selim dry of all the information that he seemed to have to give at the present moment, and had finally taken him to the strong-room on the top floor, and left him there with the injunction that he was to keep on thinking and guessing all the time, to see what he could make out of it.

"You will be well treated, Selim," he said at parting with him, and still keeping up the character of the aged Syrian; "but you cannot have your liberty until these plates are found, as well as the other things that are with them."

Conner had been out in the meantime to attend to other matters connected with the plans they were following; part of that consisted in allowing himself to be interviewed about the escape from the guard of the Syrian Selim, who had been arrested for the murder of John Seabright, and who was on his way to headquarters to reply to some questions that were to be asked of him.

It might as well be stated here that the papers, the following morning, gave a full account of the rescue that had been performed.

It told how Selim had been taken through the hallway next to the restaurant, and all trace of him lost.

The idea of this was that some of the crooks who had been associated with Prime and Potter, and therefore with Selim himself, would see the account and know that the Syrian was at liberty; that is, suppose him to be. The rest of the plan was that Nick should go forth the next day as the Syrian himself, apparently after a futile attempt at disguise, but still show enough of the personality of Selim so that any who had known him before would have no difficulty in recognizing him.

"Well, Nick, what do you make of the fellow?" asked Conner.

"Very little. He knows no more than we do about it. He has given me some valuable hint about the personality of Potter, though. That is all the good he did me."

"Perhaps that is something."

"I think it is; or, rather, I think that through it we will, perhaps, get nearer to the truth. Say, Con?"

"Well?"

"If you had thirteen boxes, two feet long by nine inches wide, by nine inches deep, each weighing between thirty and forty pounds, and you had to hide them away where a fellow like Scar-face couldn't find them, and had to do it in about four hours, where would you hide them, do you think?"

"Is that the situation?"

"That is it in a nutshell."

"Well, I'll answer you. I'm blowed if I know."

"Try and think."

"Aw, ask me an easier one. I'm not used to hiding things. I'll ask you the question."

"All right. I'll try to answer it. I wouldn't have time to bury them, because I would not have time to take them where I could bury them."

"You wouldn't hide them that way, anyhow, would you, if you had all the time in the world; eh?"

"No. I don't think so. I think I would—— *Say!*"

"Well?"

"Do you remember the manner in which Jasper Ryan got the cash he stole out of town so that nobody ever even guessed where it was?"

"Yes. He sent it to a friend of his by express; three hundred miles away."

"Well, why didn't Potter do that very thing?"

"Maybe he did, Nick."

"It is worth looking into, anyhow."

"I suppose so. But I can think of an easier way than that."

"What is it?"

"Send the boxes to a storage warehouse."

"Yes. That would be all right for you or for me, Con, but it wouldn't have done for Mr. Potter."

"Why not?"

"Because he wanted them where he could get at them at a moment's notice; he would have wanted them where he could open them without somebody looking on while he did so, and you couldn't do that in a storage warehouse."

"That's so, Nick."

"Selim confessed to me that the boxes were at the house where we arrested Prime, the last he knew about them. They were too heavy for Potter to have carried them away from there himself, so he must have sent for them. Now, Con, in the morning, the first thing you do will be to make the round of the express offices in that neighborhood. After the express offices, try the truckmen and baggage men, and even the movers. See if you can find somebody who went to that address, four days ago, and got those boxes, or anything that answers to that description."

"All right. Thirteen boxes, eh?"

"Never mind the number of them. He might have made larger packages and less in number. But the whole should weigh from three hundred and fifty to five hundred pounds."

"I suppose you are going out on the streets as Selim, aren't you, in the morning?"

"Yes."

"But not exactly openly?"

"I shall do it in just the way we have talked it over. I will look as if I had made an attempt at disguising myself, and as if I believed I had succeeded. Then I will try to put myself in the way of some of the old crowd that used to know him."

"They will be rather hard to find right about now, I imagine."

"I suppose so. What do you say to going to bed?"

They left their chairs and had stepped toward the door when the street-bell was heard to ring, and Nick went to the top of the stairs to listen while Joseph turned to the door to answer it.

A moment later he stepped into the room again, his eyes shining with the news he had to tell.

"Con," he said, "as I'm a living man I believe I recognized that voice at the door."

"As whose?" asked Conner.

"As belonging to Bill Mosely; the same Bill Mosely who was with Prime, and who was the pal of Seabright, who was killed. I think he tried to disguise the voice, and I haven't a doubt that he is in disguise himself, believing that he can fool me."

"Likely enough. Doubtless their experiences at shadowing you have given them the idea that you are not the fellow you have been cracked up to be. But the question is, What is he here for?"

"I think that is easy enough to answer."

"How do you answer it?"

"Merely by saying that, having learned all about the arrest of Horton, and therefore the entire stoppage of their own deal, Mosely has been appointed a committee of one to come here and interview me with the idea of finding out if we know anything about the existence of the plates and the things that go with them. They want to know how much we know; they want to find out if Horton, the Scar face, confessed. They know that Potter is dead and that Scar-face is in prison, and they also know that up to a few days ago nobody in the world but their own gang knew anything at all about the plates and bonds. If they are convinced that Horton has not peached, they will think that they can go about their search for the plates without fear. They have sent Mosely here merely because they want to find out just where they stand."

"Are you going to let Mosely find out that you know him, Nick?"

"That will depend upon circumstances. I don't know yet."

Joseph tapped gently upon the door at that moment, and when Nick told him to enter, he came into the room and closed the door after him.

"There is a man down-stairs to see you, sir," he said to his chief, "who says that he cannot call again to-morrow, but must see you to-night, if you will receive him. He says his name is Turner, and he told me to say that his business concerned the man who killed Vinton Potter."

"Very well," said Nick. "Tell him that I will be down in a moment. What kind of a disguise is he wearing, Joseph?"

"I did not know that it was a disguise, sir. If it is one, it is a very good one. He just looks like a man who is a little past middle age, and who belongs to the rougher element."

"Did he appear nervous or anxious?"

"Yes, sir. I thought so; a little."

"When you opened the door, Joseph, did you notice if there appeared to be anybody waiting for him outside?"

"I did not."

"Well; tell him that I will be down in a moment." Then the detective turned to Conner, and added:

"Con, I think it would be a good idea if you were to slip outside through the other house and reconnoiter a bit. I will manage to keep Mosely at least half an hour, and, if after that you think it is worth while to follow him when he leaves here, I think that will be a good idea also."

"So do I. I was on the point of suggesting it."

"It will be as good a chance as any to find out where these fellows hang out, and that is something we ought to know. They will probably leave one of their number in the rear, when he goes away from the house, to find out if any effort is made to follow them, but I don't think it will occur to them that some one is already outside keeping tabs."

"They will sure enough be on the lookout for Selim, after they read the papers to-morrow morning, and it will be well enough to know just the places where Selim—you—would be likely to encounter them."

"Yes. Well, I'll go down now and see what Mosely has to say for himself."

"Nick, do you suppose that Mosely and his pals have associated you with the old hayseed from Pennsylvania whom they were trying to relieve of his dough?"

"No. How should they know that Joshua Juniper was Nick Carter? It never appeared at all. Seabright was killed, and couldn't keep the engagement he made with me, and Mosely was much too busy about that time to have remembered the engagement. I don't think that Mosely connects the two at all."

"Then what does this move mean? Why should he dare to come here?"

"Only for the reason I have already stated, Con; just to find out how much I really know about the plans of Scar-face Horton. Mosely and his pals know that the plates are in existence; they know that there is already printed matter enough ready for circulation to make up a tidy sum of millions; they believe that they can find all that stuff if they search long enough for it, and they can do their searching to a great deal more purpose if they get the idea that they are the only ones who are doing any. That is the full thing in a nutshell."

"I believe it is."

"When I get through with Mosely I'll wait up for you, Con."

"All right, old man."

CHAPTER VII.

MOSELY, THE SELF-CONFESSED CROOK.

When the detective entered the reception-room he almost smiled in the face of the man who rose from his chair to greet him, wondering for the moment how Mosely could have supposed that the disguise he wore would have had any effect of deception upon the detective. But then he recalled what he had just said to Conner, to the effect that Mosely doubtless had no idea that Joshua Juniper had been Nick Carter in disguise, and he therefore had no reason for attempting much deception himself.

Nick was yet to discover that Mosely was about as smooth a rascal as they made.

"I've got to apologize, Mr. Carter, for making my call upon you at this time of the night," said Mosely, in a voice that was surprisingly refined, considering his appearance. He spoke with perfect modulation and enunciation; and Nick recalled the fact now that, during all his previous acquaintance with Mosely, he had said very little, but had left all the talking to his pal, Seabright.

Nick nodded. "I hadn't retired yet, so it is all right," he replied. "What can I do for you, Mr. Turner?"

"Well, Mr. Carter, I want to be square with you, for I have always understood that you like square dealing, whether it is a gentleman or a crook that you are dealing with."

"I certainly do."

"Then I'll begin by telling you that I'm a crook, and I'll add to that the fact that my name is Mosely, and not Turner. Maybe you've heard the name of Mosely recently, Mr. Carter."

"I think I have; yes. In connection with the man whom the Syrian killed."

"That's right; Jack Seabright. He was my pal."

"Well, Mosely, I don't suppose you came here to see me for your health, did you?"

"I did; and again I didn't."

"You might as well speak up, Mosely, if you have got anything to tell me. You know that I haven't much time to waste on your kind, don't you?"

"Yes. Maybe I'll interest you a bit, however, before I get through."

"All right. Go on."

"You have never happened to run afoul of me in the past, Mr. Carter, because my work has been mostly under cover. I have been a crook a good many years, and I have never seen the inside of a prison yet."

"Neither had Anthony Prime, alias Scar-face Horton," replied Nick dryly; "but he is up against it hard enough this time to make up for all the others that he has missed."

"Sure; and that's no idle dream. It is Prime that I came here to talk with you about."

"Oh; it is, eh? Well, what about him?"

"I wanted to ask you, for instance, if you knew anything more about him and the man he killed the night he was arrested, save—well, outside of the things for which he was arrested?"

"That is rather an ambiguous question, isn't it, Mose-

ly? Also a leading one? I think it is my place to reply that it is none of your business."

"Quite correct. Do you know who that man Potter really was?"

"I should change the character of my profession if I did not."

"He was the greatest engraver——"

"Oh, drop it and get down to business, Mosely."

"Well, it's this, then: I have good reason to believe that those two had one of the biggest schemes on hand that was ever pulled off by crooks. Most of the suggestions I have to offer you is guesswork, but it is all based upon facts that have come under my knowledge, and out of them, if I should give them all away to you, I think, maybe, you could make a good case."

"Wait a minute, Mosely. You're not of the kind that would come to me with a tale such as you've got on the end of your tongue right now, unless you had a deep object back of it all. Tell me what that is before you go any further. In a word, tell me the end of your story first, and then I'll inform you whether I care to hear the beginning of it or not."

"That is making it a little hard, isn't it?"

"It's that—or get out, Mosely."

"Well, then, the two of them—Potter and Scar-face—owned a lot of valuable plates which the United States government would like to put its claws on, and I think I could be of assistance in helping you find them, provided I was well paid for it."

"Possibly they can be recovered without your assistance, Mosely."

"All things are possible, Mr. Carter; that one, however, happens to be highly improbable."

"Think so?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where the plates you refer to are hidden?"

"No. If I did know, I wouldn't be here treating with you."

"That sounds logical. But just why are you here treating with me, as you call it?"

"Because I have made up my mind to two things: First, that I can't find those plates without you; and, second, that I don't believe you can find them without me."

"Tell me why you don't think I can find them without you."

"Well, I knew Potter mighty well. He was a much craftier man than he was given credit for being. He was long-headed, while never appearing to be so. He was always, in his own quiet way, just a little too much for Scar-face. If these plates exist, you can bank upon it that he hid them away where even Scar-face couldn't find them—and that is where they are now."

"You say now. 'If they exist.' You said a moment ago—or, at least, I so understood you, that they do exist."

"Pardon me, I did not say that. I said that I had good reason to believe that they exist, and that I believe I can find them, with your help, if they do exist."

"I stand corrected. That is about what you did say, that's a fact. Now, don't you think that from your point of view, if the plates do exist, you have done a very foolish thing in coming to me and giving the thing away?"

"No; I don't."

"Explain to me just what your game is, Mosely, for I confess that I don't understand it."

"My game is simply that I want to help you find those plates, if they do exist, and that I want to be well paid for my services."

"What do you call well paid?"

"Well, if we find the plates and they are turned over to you, I ought to get a hundred thousand dollars out of it."

"Who has told you that Nick Carter is such an easy mark as all that, Mosely? Who informed you that you could come here and sell a gold brick to me?"

"I don't see how you call it a gold brick, when I say if they do not exist you have nothing to pay me. When I tell you that if I have not rendered service in finding them—if they are found—you owe me nothing."

"Your proposition is that you work with me as a sort of assistant in this matter; is that the idea?"

"Why, yes, if you want to put it that way?"

"Don't you think that you are doing me rather too much honor, Mosely?"

"I don't know why you need to be sarcastic about it, Mr. Carter. It's a fair proposition that I make you. I came out distrusted in the beginning by admitting that I was a crook, and by telling you my name. I'm on the level in this, and I'll be on the level to the end of it, if you'll let me."

"But wouldn't we be looking for a pig in a poke? You don't even know that the thing exist that you are talking about. You only suspect—what the government

possibly already has suspected—that two such men as Scar-face and Potter were not hand-in-glove with each other for nothing. Why didn't you go to Chief Wilkie, in Washington, instead of coming to me?"

"Because I am satisfied in my own mind that they do exist."

"Well, if they do, what have I got to do with it?"

"Wouldn't the government pay well for their capture—for the privilege of destroying the plates?"

"Very probably—provided the government had sufficient reason to believe in their existence."

"They would believe in that if they saw the plates, wouldn't they?"

"Very likely."

"If we found them and you took them to the proper officials, you would be well paid for their recovery, would you not?"

"That is possible, too."

"Well, they wouldn't treat with me, not for a minute, would they?"

"No; I don't think they would."

"Well, then, if we found the plates, and you returned them, and you were paid for it, and you afterward divided what you got with me, or gave me a stated amount out of it——"

"Mosely, we are wasting time. You want to sell me something, and you haven't got anything to sell. You have only got an idea, and not a very good one at that. I ran up against Scar-face because he had been shadowing me for a fortnight, and he had annoyed me. I found out later that he was living at the Mammoth under the name of Prime, and that Potter was with him a great deal of the time. I knew something about Potter, or, at least, I found out something about him, and it was at once suspected that there was either a big counterfeiting deal on hand, or a big forgery in prospect; perhaps both. I was led, as those two men supposed, into a trap, where I was to be murdered, and that poor wife of Prime's was to be accused of the crime. Things did not turn out just the way Prime had planned, and the result of it all was that Prime killed Potter, tried to kill me, gave himself away in regard to the murder of your pal Seabright, and so got himself into his present trouble. In a few weeks or months, as the case may be, he will receive an electric shock that will put him out of business, and in Potter and him this country will be rid of two of the most troublesome crooks we have had to contend with. If it was some great forgery that they were contemplating, it can't be pulled off now for the reason that the forger is as good as dead. If it was a counterfeit game, it can't be pulled off now, because the secret of the hiding-place of the plates and stuff died with Potter; and there you are. It is getting late, too, Mosely. I would suggest that for the present you drop the l out of your name, and mosey, because I wish to retire. I would also suggest that the air of New York City is decidedly bad for you, and, since you are a self-confessed crook, you had better get out of it as soon as you know how, for otherwise I will make it my business to introduce you to something which you say you have never seen. I refer to the inside of a prison. We don't want you here. There are plenty without you. I'll tell you one more thing. Selim, the Syrian, escaped to-night. It will all be in the papers in the morning. You are suspected of having a hand in that affair——"

"Selim has escaped?" There was unmistakable joy in the expression, which did not escape Nick Carter.

"Your simulation of surprise is very well done, Mosely, but if I did my duty I should detain you here now, and send you down to headquarters to be questioned. I can't do that because you came here and threw yourself on my mercy; but if I run across you anywhere, half an hour after you leave here, look out for snags. Come; I'll show you where the door is; you may have forgotten it. Right this way, Mr. William Mosely."

"Maybe, Carter, you'll be sorry for this yet."

"That is quite possible; but you will be sorrier."

"I might have helped you."

"Possibly; but I have never yet descended to the use of stool pigeons, and I won't now. I advise you not to forget what I said about leaving New York."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER ENTERS THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

It was about noon of the following day when Nick Carter thoroughly made up to represent the faint semblance to the Syrian, Selim, as he had proposed, made his way swiftly along Houston Street, some distance east of the Bowery, and presently paused near the curbstone, and appeared to glance around him as if undecided where to go.

His make-up was one of the most perfect that the de-

tective had ever taken the trouble to arrange, for he knew that he would have to deal with men who were very sharp, and who would be suspicious every moment of the time.

He represented a Syrian all right.

Nobody would have denied that to have looked at him or talked with him, although he spoke English very well indeed, too.

But he had not missed a point in his "get-up."

To one who would have known Selim well and at once —Mosely, for example—Nick looked as if he were Selim who had made a great effort to disguise himself, and had signally failed, while supposing all the time that he had succeeded. That is, there was not enough disguise about him to conceal the identity of Selim, but there was enough to account for any failure on Nick's part to have made himself entirely a counterpart of the man in whose name he was masquerading.

The big, square building just beyond where he paused and appeared to hesitate, was his real destination.

It was a place known all through that section of the city as the "Rookery." It was not a very pleasant place to contemplate, either, for it was known as the resort of thieves and rogues of all classes, and the maze of its interior had more than once set the officers of the law at defiance when they had followed some prospective prey through its mysterious hallways.

Nick had been hoping that fortune might do him a good turn this particular morning, and it did, now at about the hour of noon, for, as he hesitated there, near the curb, he saw Mosely—the Mosely he had known at the Hotel Mammoth—come into the street through one of the doors of the Rookery, and glance around him as if undecided which way he wanted to go.

To the detective's surprise, Mosely had a grip in his hand, as if he were going out of town; but while he looked around him he gave a start of surprise, and then, without any hesitation at all, started at once, and at a rapid pace, toward Nick Carter.

Nick made the recognition appear to be mutual, for he also gave a sudden start of surprise, and ran forward eagerly.

But half-way to Mosely, the latter made him a sign to be quiet, and then, as they met, exclaimed:

"Go on, you fool! Don't seem to recognize me. Go through that door I just came out of. I will be there in a minute."

The detective passed through the doorway and stood there waiting for Mosely to return, which he did, presently.

"Follow me, Selim," he said then, and continued on his way through the building, presently ascending stairs and winding around through dark and mysterious hallways, until at last he put a key in the lock of a door, and opened it.

They were in a small room which gave upon a tiny back-yard. An ell of the building ran along one side of the yard, and from the window of a room there, to the window of this room, there was a double rope.

Nick, as Selim, grinned broadly when he discovered that, and pointed toward it with a nod.

"Yes," replied Mosely to the unasked question. "It is a quick getaway, and a good one. I have been reading the papers this morning, Selim. That was a pretty good escape you made last night. Who was it helped you to do it? Eh?"

"Some of my own countrymen, Mosely," replied the supposed Syrian.

"I'm a little shy about trusting you, Selim. The escape was accomplished almost too easily. It has the look of a 'plant' to me; as if it was a put-up job down at headquarters, and some of these fly-cops down there thought they could pull the wool over my eyes—and the eyes of others as well."

For reply Nick merely shrugged his shoulders and remained silent.

"Well, what have you got to say about it?" demanded Mosely crossly.

"Nothing. I am here. It is enough. If you don't want me I can go away, and do the rest of the work I have planned alone."

"Did anybody suggest to you that you were perfectly disguised, Selim?" asked Mosely sarcastically.

"Why? Isn't it good?"

"Good! I knew you half a block away; and so would any of the coppers who happened to be searching for you this morning. I wonder that you weren't picked off long before this."

"Perhaps," said the supposed Selim, without the glimmer of a smile, "it was because of that 'plant' you just spoke about."

"Well, that escape of yours does look fishy, Selim. Your countrymen helped you, you tell me. Why didn't you remain with them then? Why didn't they give you

a place to hide and take care of you until you were safe? Tell me that?"

"Bah! Why should I tell you? If you suspect me, I will go my own way. I don't ask any odds of you, Mosely."

"Don't get sassy, Selim, or it may occur to me to call in the cops."

"If you did that, Mosely, you would perhaps be dead before they arrived. I am not afraid of you; but I did think that you had some sense."

"I've got too much to be played for a sucker, Selim."

The supposed Selim only smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Tell me why your countrymen went to all that trouble to get you out of the hands of the law?" demanded Mosely.

"I suppose it was because they wanted the bonds, and the plates, and the certificates of stock, and all the money that is already printed and signed and ready for circulation. That is why they thought it a great thing to transfer me from one prison to another; from the Tombs to a room where I could not get out, they thought; to a place from which they thought they could compel me to help them in the search for the things that Potter left behind him."

"Oho! So that was the game, was it?" cried Mosely.

"That was the way it would have looked to you had you been there."

"And you made a second escape?"

"I am here."

"Don't they know what became of you?"

"I did not wait to ascertain, Mosely. I am here. I supposed I would find you here, or, at least, near here. I wanted to talk with you: but first I must ask you if you feel any enmity against poor Selim on account of the death of Seabright?"

"Bah! Why should I? He is gone. I can't bring him back, and I wouldn't if I could."

"Then"—he leaned forward toward Mosely—"do you want to find the plates and the other things, Mosely?"

"Do I?"

"Do you want to join with me in the hunt for them?"

"Yes; if once you convince me that this is not a plant."

"I shall not try to do that. It is for you to decide. I am here. It is enough. I can do the work alone, but it is better to have assistance. If you do not care to go into it, I can find another who will."

"Do you think you can find them, Selim?"

"If I did not think so I would not be here. I would not have taken the risk to look for you when there is a reward out for the recapture of poor Selim. Were you giving it up and going away when I saw you just now?"

"I was going away, but I was not giving up."

"No?"

"I was going in search of the plates—and the 'queer.'"

"Where?"

"You know well enough. To the same place where I think you would search for them."

"Do you mean Vermont?"

"Yes."

"You forget that Potter had not the time to take the things there. You forget the weight of them, in all the boxes they were packed in."

"I don't know anything about the weight of them or the boxes; do you?"

"Yes; there were thirteen boxes. They weighed over four hundred pounds. Potter never had the time to take them to Vermont. Besides, you were not going there today; you were going to Boston first."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I know that it is to Boston that the wife of Scar-face has gone, until she is wanted here for her testimony. It is by permission of the District Attorney. Oh, I have my own ways of getting information."

"Well, I will admit that I was going there. What, then?"

"Only that it would have been a wild-goose chase, that is all."

"What would you do?"

"I would look for the plates—and the other things."

"Where would you look for them?"

"I would put our heads together and go over very carefully everything that we both knew about Potter. From what we discovered from that, we could guess pretty well where he might have hidden the plates; don't you think so?"

"I don't know. I have thought it all over myself, and I was really starting for Vermont, although I will admit that I was going by way of Boston, to see if the woman does know anything. I have an idea that she does."

"And do you suppose she would tell you if she does?"

"I don't know, but I have a good reason for thinking that she would tell me enough to aid me considerable, Selim."

"What reason is that?"

"I was always good to her. I was always really sorry for her. Scar-face was such a brute, and two or three times I saved her from him—I mean from blows that he would have struck her if I had not interfered."

"But she would not know where the plates were. She did not even know that they existed, did she? She was not a crook like ourselves. You know that."

"I know, of course; but she was the easiest person to impose upon that ever lived. Perhaps, Selim, you don't know how it happened that Potter fixed up a place in Vermont to do his work on the plates."

"No; I do not."

"She sent him there."

"Scar-face's wife sent him there?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"She sent him to some relatives of hers. He gave her a song-and-dance about writing a book; some sort of a treatise on plants and ferns, and also minerals. That is why I thought I would go to Boston and get all the particulars from her. It might give us a clue. And, Selim, if you and I can get hold of those plates and the other things, our everlasting fortune is made right there."

CHAPTER IX.

SIX BAD MEN OF THE ROOKERY.

"The only difficulty that I see at present," said the supposed Selim meditatively, "is in that fact that Nick Carter and other detectives are probably searching for the same things we are; and they are likely to find them before we do, for the reason that they can do their searching in the open, while we have got to do ours under cover."

Mosely smiled knowingly.

"Don't give yourself any uneasiness about that, Selim," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because I went there last night purposely to find out."

"Went where?"

"To Nick Carter's house."

"To see *him?*"

"Yes."

"That was plucky of you. What did you find out?"

"I found out exactly what I wanted to know, and that was that Carter doesn't believe in the existence of the plates, or, if he does, he is not bothering his head about them. Why should he do so, anyhow? What are the plates to him unless the government especially engages his services to find them? Nothing."

"He may have fooled you, Mosely."

"He didn't even try to do that. He politely ordered me out of the house, and told me if I remained in New York he'd put me behind the bars."

"I suspect that that was one of the reasons why you were starting for Boston to-day; eh?"

"Well, I thought if I could combine business with caution it wouldn't be a bad idea."

"Look here, Mosely, how many of the old gang are in this thing with you?"

"What's that got to do——"

"It has got a lot to do with it. I want to know who is in this thing with you, and what sort of a share they expect out of it when the work is done."

"There needn't be anybody in it with you and me, now that we have got together, need there, Selim?" suggested Mosely, leaning a little forward and grinning into the face of the supposed Selim.

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"They will want to be in it," he said. "They will expect to be in it. The minute they find that you're going to give them the double-cross they will betray me to the police, and they are likely to do other things that won't be pleasant. How many are there?"

"Six."

"Besides ourselves?"

"Yes."

"That is too many."

"That is what I think. But I'll tell you this much, Selim."

"Well?"

"There is only one way in which we can get out of it now, and that is the way that Scar-face would have done it; the way that *you* can do it. You know what I mean."

For reply Nick took from one of the pockets of his disguise a blow-gun that had previously been taken from Selim, looked at it meditatively for a moment, and returned it in silence to his pocket. Then he looked up and grinned, and Mosely nodded.

"Would you do it, Selim?" he asked.

"If necessary, it might happen. But can we make use of them, to help us find the plates, before it is done?"

"Yes. Anyhow, we can try."

"Where are they now?"

"Waiting orders from me."

"Where?"

"In this building."

"But you were going away just now without them; no?"

"Yes. I was going to take chances."

Nick laughed.

"Selim knows," he said. "You thought you would take the trip to Boston on your own account, and if you found out anything definite, you would skip along and change the hiding-place of everything. Then you would have returned here or sent for the others, and you'd have been content to let them fuss around a year or so without finding anything, till they all got tired of the game. You could afford to wait; eh, Mosely?"

"How well you read me, Selim," replied the crook, with a grin.

"And now, a little later, I suppose," said Nick slowly, "after we have found the things and you know it is all there, you will watch for a good opportunity to put a bullet or a knife, or a dose of poison, into me; eh?"

"I might as well say that you would put one of your murderous darts into me."

"I will confess that I have thought about it since we have been sitting here."

"You cold-blooded devil!"

"No more so than you, for you may as well confess that you have been planning, since we have been talking, how you could get rid of me after the boodle is discovered."

"Well; we're quits then. Shall we make an agreement, Selim?"

"No; we will watch each other instead. It will be safer. Now, about the other six. Who are they?"

"Ruddy and Pete; Three-fingers and Cockeye; Dog-face and Mike."

"What has become of the others?"

"They weren't in the secret, and you know it. They have escaped. Faded away. They are out of it."

"Well, if the six are in this building, I think you had better send for them and let me talk to the bunch for a while. Get them all in here where I can look at them while I am talking. Maybe, among the lot of them, we can pick up a little information that will be valuable."

Mosely departed to do as was suggested, leaving Nick alone in the room for the time; and the detective's thoughts while he awaited the return are worth recording.

"This was the wisest move that I could have made," he told himself. "While it is not at all likely that any one of these men know enough to create a clue that is worth following, it is more than likely that the collective knowledge of all of them will give me one. At present I am of the opinion that Vermont is the place to look for the plates, and, of course, it would be somewhere near that place that Selim called Landgrove.

"But that isn't enough. I want to trace the things directly, if it is possible. Couner is out interviewing the express offices this morning and afternoon, but I haven't any hope that he will find out anything in that way. Potter was too slick not to cover his tracks if he sent the stuff away.

"One thing is certain: if he did send it away, he consigned it to another person than himself, and that other person now has the things in charge, either with knowledge of what the boxes contain, or in total ignorance of their contents, which is the more likely thing.

"He would send them where he could get at them without interference when he wanted to do so, and, since he did the work in Vermont, he probably used part of the time in arranging for a good hiding-place.

"I never knew of a counterfeit-plate engraver yet whose first thought was not to think out and arrange a good hiding-place for his plates after they were completed."

There was a tap at the door, and it opened to admit Three-fingers and Cockeye. They were closely followed by the others, and presently all the men who had been named were inside the room.

The greetings that they gave the supposed Selim were not any too warm.

He was cordially hated by most of them, for the reason that they feared him.

More than once, others who had been in the gang and who had offended Scar-face had disappeared mysteriously, or had been found dead somewhere, and Selim was suspected of being the cause in every instance.

When Mosely went to them and told them that Selim

was in his room and waiting, they all kicked, and at first swore that they would have nothing to do with him; but when Mosely suggested that they make use of the Syrian as far as they could, and then knock him on the head and forget him, they all grasped at the idea as being a good one.

Nick, recalling the mannerisms of Selim, greeted each man as he entered with an oily smile and a nod of recognition, although nearly all of them he had never himself seen until that moment. As soon as they were seated he began:

"My very good friends——"

"Say, you, Selim," growled Cockeye, "don't you make any mistake. We ain't your very good friends, and we don't ever expect to be. If you're in the business and have got anything to offer that's going to hurry it along, spit it out. If we decide that you've got the goods with you, you can stay in and have your share. If you haven't got the goods—well, you don't get out of this room alive; that's all. That's flat, too."

A murmur of approval showed that Cockeye had voiced the feelings of all toward Selim; and Nick, still with the same oily smile and in the same voice, began all over again:

"My very good friends, I am not afraid of you in the least. The seven of you are all together more afraid of me at this moment—and you have reason to be.

"But that is not to the point. The point is that we are here to consult together as to the best means of finding the plates, the bonds, the certificates of stock, and the counterfeit money that we know Potter hid away somewhere. We wish to find it, do we not?"

"Yes," they growled back at him.

"Well, it is my idea that not one of you has an idea where to look for them. I think I have one. It is my idea, also, that if we find out what each one of you knows, and put all the knowledge together so that we can use it, it will tell us something. Now, if you are willing to answer me questions as I shall ask them, we will undertake to do it. If you are not, I will bid you all good day, and leave you, content with the thought that I can find the things alone, and perfectly sure that you cannot find them without me."

"You're mighty certain about yourself, aren't you?" sneered Ruddy.

"Think you're smart don't you," laughed Three-fingers.

"Hear the cock-a-doodle-do!" shouted Dogface.

The supposed Selim calmly picked up his hat, and then, with a quick turn, wheeled upon the assembled crooks, holding a pistol in either hand, and smiling over them calmly as he said:

"I will go my way, then, without you. I wish you much luck—nit!"

He stepped swiftly to the door, when suddenly Cockeye called out:

"Here, Selim, wait. We cave! We throw up our hands. Go ahead with your questions, if you think it's going to do any good to ask them. We're in this thing to win, and if you think you can show us the way to do it, why, we're with you. You know as well as we do that not one of us likes you any too well. You're too infernal expert with that blow-gun of yours. But I reckon we're in this business together, and that there is enough in sight to make us all satisfied. Come back and go ahead with your questions."

"Is that the wish of all?" asked Nick, still smiling with Selim's smile.

"Yes," they assented.

"Then, very well, I will put you each, in turn, on the witness-stand, and you must answer the questions I ask."

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER MAKES THE BAD MEN TESTIFY.

"Cockeye," said the supposed Selim, "I will ask you to sit in that chair while I ask you some questions. Thank you. Now, when did you first know Potter? Before you reply to the question, let me remind you all that we are trying to learn a dead man's secret. I think that collectively you know it, while individually you do not. We will see. Now answer the question."

"I knew Potter ten years ago, when he worked for a bank-note company down-town."

"Was he a crook then?"

"No; neither was I."

"But you were both tending in that direction?"

"I suppose so."

"Did you ever discuss such things?"

"Not about turning crooks ourselves, if that is what you mean; but we used to talk about what fools some of the crooks made of themselves in getting caught the first thing."

"That is precisely what I wanted to know. You talked sometimes about avoiding detection, if you should happen to do anything wrong; eh?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember any of those conversations?"

"Yes. A lot of them."

"Do you happen to remember one that had to do with his own business?"

"By jingo, Selim, it's funny how you remind me of things that I'd clean forgotten. Yes, I do remember once of asking him how he would hide plates that he had made, supposing them to be 'queer,' or some that he had stolen."

"Do you remember what he said about it?"

"Yes. He said he had never thought about it, but if he had occasion to do such a thing, it would be so well done that nobody would find them. I asked him about it again later, and I remember that his answer made me mad."

"Why?"

"It was a fool answer. He said that he'd probably run brass around them to make people believe they were cannons."

"That was a good answer, and it was significant. How did it happen that you both became crooks?"

"I don't know anything about his case, and mine don't count. I nipped a wad one day that didn't belong to me. That's all. I hadn't seen him, then, for years, and didn't again until years afterward."

"Did you ever talk with him about these particular plates?"

"Only once."

"What was said then?"

"I asked him to give me a square deal in the matter, because we were old-time acquaintances. He answered that he would see me through all right if I would stick to him. I told him that I would, and asked him how much he proposed to make out of the deal. He said it would get into the millions. I asked him where the plates were, and he winked at me, and said they were where nobody but himself could find them. That's all."

"Did you never hear him suggest how he might have concealed them?"

"No."

"Can you think of anything more that is to the point?"

"No."

"Well, you have given me one valuable bit of information; that about the brass. Now, Three-fingers, you take the chair. I have noticed that when you talk you say 'haow, naow, raow, allaow,' and all that, all of which suggests to me that you are from Vermont yourself. Am I right about that?"

"No. I'm from New Hampshire, if anybody should ask you."

"It is the same thing. Did you ever talk with Potter about your own State or Vermont?"

"Yes. It was I who suggested that he go up into that country to do his work."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because I knew that he could find lots of places among the mountains where he could hide to beat the band. I suggested that he might find Vermont even better than my own State, because it was wilder."

"Go on. What more on that subject?"

"Well, we were with Scar-face at the time. His wife was in the room, I remember, and, although Potter and I were talking in low tones, she heard Vermont mentioned, and she said that she came from there, and asked what we were saying about it."

"Well?"

"I nudged Potter, and told him to talk to her, and while they talked she let out that she had relatives in a place called Landgrove. Then I whispered to Potter that it was the very thing. Then she said her people's names were Carson, and——"

"That will do. Did he finally communicate with the Carsons?"

"Yes. He found out that they had a place right on the side of a mountain where there was a forest; and that is where he went later on, I suppose, although I have never thought about it since."

"Did you ever talk with him about these plates we are looking for?"

"Once."

"What was said?"

"I asked him the very day he was killed where he had hid them, and he laughed in my face, and replied:

"'They are hidden where neither you nor any other man will ever find them, unless I guide you there.' Then he laughed and went on: 'Three-fingers, they are in a safe that is big enough to hold them, and strong enough to keep them until I get ready to break it open. It is a burglar-proof safe, too, because a burglar who knows his business would never think of looking inside of it.

And it's a police-proof safe, because it doesn't stay long enough in one place for a policeman to find it. It's a fire-proof safe, because it won't burn. Now, if you can guess that riddle you will know where the plates are.' And he went away, laughing."

"Very well; don't you see that that takes us back again to what Cockeye said about running brass around them? Now, Ruddy, what do you know?"

"Not a cursed thing."

"Did you never talk with Potter about these things that you have heard mentioned?"

"Never."

"Ever hear him express an opinion about hiding things away?"

"Never."

"Dogface, did you?"

"Not much. I heard him say once that people always went into the next county to hunt and fish when there was better game, as a rule, next door. He said that people never looked under their own noses for things, but always insisted upon gazing over the tops of other people's heads. We were talking about Nick Carter at the time."

"How did that happen?"

"I don't remember. Something had been said about detectives, and he said the reason that Carter was a good detective was because he always looked around close to him before he began to search in the next county."

"Have you anything to suggest?"

"Only this. I always thought that Potter was struck on Mrs. Horton. I've got an idea that she knows where their things are. Maybe she don't, but I think she does. I don't mean that she would know *what* they are—maybe you understand what I mean."

"Yes. I think I do."

"She isn't any crook, you know; she never was; but that is just the reason why a feller with the soft ways that Potter had could impose upon her."

"Pete, what have you got to suggest to us?" asked Nick of the next man.

"I ain't got nothin' to suggest, and I never did have. It's my own private opinion that you ain't none of you ever goin' to find them plates, and if there is anybody here who is game enough, he can buy out my chances right here and now—cheap."

"How much?" asked Cockeye quickly.

"An even thousand."

"You're on, Pete. I take you. Anybody else want to sell out?"

"I'll follow in Pete's train," said Mike.

"You're on, too. Anybody else?" asked Cockeye.

No one replied, and for a moment there was silence in the room, which was presently broken by Three-fingers, who exclaimed:

"Well, Selim, you had your testimony; now what do you make of it?"

"If I should tell you what I make of it," replied Nick, with the characteristic smile of the man he was personating, "you would know as much as I think I know now. I have heard enough already to make me think that I can go from here almost straight to those plates; but if I do go to them, you must all agree right now to obey my orders."

"Well, I for one ain't goin' to act under the orders of a dago," shouted Cockeye. "You may be a Syrian all right enough, but you're a dago just the same."

Nick moved slowly across the room toward the door, and managed not to attract attention to the fact until he was quite near it. The others were engaged in talking among themselves, and paid very little attention to him for the moment; but suddenly Mosely raised his eyes, and evidently discovered what the supposed Selim was up to.

"Here, you!" he called. "Where are you going?"

"Outside," replied Nick quickly; and, turning like a flash, he opened the door, sprang past it, pulled it shut after him, and before any of those he had left behind him could get it open, he had transferred the key to the outside, and turned it, thus locking them tightly inside the room.

As he turned the key, he dropped flat upon the floor; and he was only just in time, for at that instant two revolvers rang out, immediately followed by three others, and the bullets from them crashed through the thin boards of the door as if it had been so much paper.

"I don't care to bother with any of those fellows," was the detective's thought. "All I want are the plates, bonds, and the other things that go with them."

He could hear them hammering at the door as he made his way carefully to the stairway, and, leaping the balustrade at a bound, disappeared below.

He had barely reached the bottom of the stairs ere he heard a crash, which told him that the door had been broken down; and that the men were pouring forth on his

trail, so, instead of hastening toward the street, he made his way farther along through the house, and at last found what he sought—the open door of an empty room.

Stepping inside, he closed the door after him, and then began at once to do away with all the resemblance he bore to the Syrian.

With a small sponge and some liquid from a vial he carried, the stain was quickly washed away, the black wig he had worn disappeared, a cap took the place of the hat he had worn, the coat was turned wrong-side out, his collar and tie were removed, and a handkerchief was tied around his neck in place of them, and many other slighter changes and alterations were made, and then he stepped outside the door again, and made his way slowly along the hall toward the stairs that would take him to the ground floor.

Below him he could hear some evidences of excitement, and when he arrived at the street he found Three-fingers and Cockeye there asking questions about a certain Syrian; but Nick walked calmly past them, and went on his way unnoticed.

CHAPTER XI.

A CHASE THROUGH THREE STATES.

"Conner," said the detective when he entered his own study half an hour later, "I think I have got the whole thing down fine."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, as I suspected would be the case all along, if only I could get those crooks together and make them talk, they knew enough among the lot of them to provide me with the clue I wanted. Anyhow, I am going ahead on the plan I have formed, and you see if it does not pan out just as I say it will."

"But how do you say it will pan out?"

"Like this: First we know that Potter had very little time to make any changes in his place of hiding with stuff that was so bulky and that weighed so much."

"That is true enough."

"Selim says that there were only about four hours when he did not personally know where Potter was, and it is certain that he could not have done all that was done in that short time."

"I agree with you."

"Then he not only had an assistant to help him, but he also had other things in readiness. The fact that the plates in their boxes were already in the keeping of Mrs. Horton proves that she did not know what they were. It also suggests that he had already made arrangements with her by which, upon a certain message from him, she was to send them away to a place agreed upon. You did not find anything at any of the express offices, did you?"

"Not a thing."

"Nor any evidence that the stuff had been sent from any of them?"

"No."

"I did not think you would at the last. It all goes to prove that Potter sent the stuff by freight to its destination. Now, I have gleaned from these men I have talked to that Potter believed in covering things up; he also believed in concealing things as near to you as possible. I don't mean by that that he believed in keeping them near you, but in fixing them so that if you got in the vicinity of them they would be under your nose all the time, and consequently in the place you would least expect to find them."

"I suppose that all that is very plain to you, but I confess that it is not so to me."

"Well, I mean that if he sent them somewhere by freight, as I think he did, he would wish to make the whole consignment look like some sort of cheap stuff that wasn't worth while bothering about."

"I can follow you there, Nick."

"So he had his boxes to put the other boxes inside of all ready. These might have been of metal or of wood, but, whatever they were, they each had a piece conveniently knocked off, or purposely left open so that any one looking at them would suppose that he saw what was contained inside. These boxes must have been already marked, so that, with the aid of Mrs. Horton, he could have prepared them all for shipment inside of an hour. See?"

"Yes."

"Then he told her that he would send a truck around after them presently, and went out. The only thing that she had to do was to deliver them to the truckman, and you may rest assured that *he* came from a distant part of the city, and had already been ordered to be in readiness at a certain corner, we will say.

"Now, Conner, there are two places where he might have sent that stuff; I mean, two general places, for one of them comprehends the whole United States."

"Whew. Go on. You don't mean that, of course."

"I mean that unless he sent that stuff to one certain place that I have in mind, he might have sent it anywhere at all, to wait there until he called for it and proved his ownership. Freight, not called for, is kept one year, and then sold at auction; but I don't think that Potter would have taken that sort of a chance, because there was always the possibility of his being arrested and detained five years or more. He would sent it, therefore, where he could find it again five or ten years hence."

"I agree with you there."

"Then there is only one place, and that would be at Landgrove, Vermont, in the care of the relatives of Mrs. Horton. Their names are Carson."

"Then that is the place where we must look for the stuff, eh?"

"Yes. But they were shipped by freight only five days ago. I have looked at a railway guide, and I find that to get to Landgrove you first have to go to Brattleboro, and then change to a narrow gage road that goes to a town called South Londonderry. From there you drive a number of miles."

"Well, what of it?"

"This of it. It is only five days now since that consignment could possibly have started, and the likelihood is that it is not half-way there yet."

"What? In five days?"

"Yes. In five days. It might possibly have gotten as far as Brattleboro, but I don't believe it has gone any farther by this time. We will have to catch it in transit."

"How are we to do that?"

"Why, go to the New Haven freight-office, on the East River front, and find out first if freight of this description was shipped about that time. If it was, get all the particulars about it, the number of the car in which it was sent, and so on. Then chase it up."

"Do you think that it is really the solution of this case?"

"I do. If it has gotten ahead of us and gone faster than I have supposed, all that we will have to do will be to follow it to Landgrove."

"Well, what is the procedure, Nick?"

"I want you to start at once for Brattleboro. You can find out there if such stuff has already arrived and has been transferred to the narrow gage. If it has, wire to me. If it has not, wait there until it does come, or until I get there."

"And you?"

"In the meantime I will be following it up from this end. Now you have got just about time to catch a train, if you wish to start to-night."

"All right. I'm off. But one question more. Don't you think it is worth while to go to Boston and interview Mrs. Horton?"

"No; I think it would be time wasted. It might clinch our theory, but we can find out if the theory is correct in the time we would take to get there and see her. Besides, she is not straight in her mind since that terrible scene she passed through, and I doubt if she could tell us much even if she tried. Go ahead, Con, as I have outlined it to you. I will be about twelve to twenty-four hours behind you."

* * * * * * *

The following morning, quite early, Nick appeared at the freight-office of the New Haven company, and, having found the right man to question, told him that he was trying to trace some freight that had been shipped six days previously. Then he pretended to look through all his pockets for memoranda he had taken concerning it, and then he laughed, and said:

"Well, I cannot tell you the name of the person to whom it was consigned; I only know that it was addressed to a town called Landgrove, in Windham County, Vermont, and that it had to go via Brattleboro and the narrow gage road in order to reach there."

"Well, that's enough," said the man; and he began to turn the leaves of his wide-paged bill-book.

"Here it is," he called out presently. "At least this looks like it. Seven crates, each containing two boxes of light castings. Total weight 795 pounds. Consigned to Peter Vinton, care of J. C. Carson, Landgrove, Vermont."

"That is it," replied Nick. To himself he added "Potter put his first name, Vinton, last, and changed his first name from Potter to Peter. Then aloud:

"I wonder if there is any method of discovering where that freight is about now?"

"I don't know how, sir."

"Isn't there a record of the car-number in which it was shipped?"

"Of the car in which it started from here; yes. But it might be transferred to other cars several times. My own opinion is that you would find it pretty nearly at the end of the route, or at least as far along as Brattleboro."

Nick took the train that afternoon for Brattleboro, and arrived at nine o'clock in the evening, to find that Conner was awaiting him at Towne's Hotel.

"Well, Con," he asked, "have you found out anything about our stuff yet?"

"Yes, Nick; but I got your wire, and thought I would wait for you. It has gone on up the narrow gage. It left here on the freight yesterday."

"Then it ought to be lying in the freight-office at South Londonderry right now, Con."

"That is about my idea of it."

"What are you looking so anxious about, Con?"

"Anxious? Do I look anxious? I didn't know it. It isn't anxiety, it is only perplexity."

"What about?"

"I could have sworn just before dark that I saw Mosely on the street here, and I did not think about it until too late—I mean that it did not occur to me until it was too late, that I ought to have followed that freight up the road on the passenger-train to-night."

"Isn't there another train?"

"No. There is only one passenger-train each way each day. It comes down here in the morning and returns at night. The freight that leaves here in the morning drags a coach with it, and will carry passengers, but it takes between five and six hours to go the thirty-six miles to the end of the road."

"Thirty-six miles. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Well, Con, I think if there is an automobile in this town we will chase that freight up this very night, if you are at all certain about Mosely."

"I'm not dead sure. I only got a glimpse of him, but I certainly thought it was he."

"Come on. Let's go down-stairs."

In the office of the hotel the detective went straight to the desk, and, finding the proprietor there, called him aside and asked:

"Do you know of a man in this town who has an automobile that will carry two passengers, who would like to earn a hundred dollars between now and daylight by taking a trip of forty miles."

"Do I? Yes, sir. You are looking him right in the eye right now."

"Then you're on, mister, and you can't get it ready any too quickly."

"Are you chasing that other lot?" asked the proprietor.

"What other lot?"

"There was a bunch of four went out of here three hours ago bound for the same place—that is, if you're going to Londonderry. They hired a car down at the other hotel."

"Is that so? Do you know the names of any of them?"

"No."

"They should be near the end of their route by this time, don't you think?"

"Yes; if they didn't break down. That car they've got is no good. Are you after them?"

"No: not particularly, unless they get what we are after before we do. But, all the same, I will add something substantial to that price if you can overtake them, or get us there before they have a chance to get away."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BATTLE ON THE HILL.

That wild ride through the night through one of the most picturesque gorges in the mountains that can be imagined Nick Carter never forgot.

There were places along the road where it seemed as if they could not get through, but always the man who guided the machine seemed to know the way perfectly, and they surmounted the most threatening difficulties with no trouble at all.

New Fane, Dummerston, and the other villages along the line were passed with never a light showing in any of them, and all the while they kept a steady up-grade, until it seemed to Conner and Nick that they must be approaching the summits of the Green Mountains themselves.

But their speed was necessarily slow, for the roads were bad, the way was rough, and there were very many of the steep grades before referred to.

It was eleven o'clock when they left Brattleboro, and it was half-past three in the morning when they rounded the bend in the road and came in sight of the little station at its terminus, which is called South Londonderry.

Nowhere was there a sign of life.

It seemed as if the village itself was dead.

Not even a light glimmered from a window to tell them that there were living human beings in that benighted place, and nowhere along the road had they discovered any evidences of the automobile that preceded them, save that in soft spots along the road they found the wheel-tracks of one.

"I'm afraid they have gotten here ahead of us, Con," said the detective, as he leaped out of the car near the station platform and ran down toward the line of freight-cars where they were standing. "Tell our friend to wait for us, and then you come with me."

But they did not have to look far to tell what had happened.

They found at once where the door of the freight-house had been forced open, and left in that condition, and they could see the empty crates, where the freight they were searching for had been torn open and the smaller boxes taken from the big ones.

"That would reduce the weight they would have to carry, from eight hundred to about, or even less than five hundred," said Conner, pointing at it.

"Yes," said the detective; "but even that would add too much to the load they were already carrying. If we can find their tracks we won't have any difficulty in overtaking them."

"Maybe they would split up their party, and leave only one to carry the freight away, the others to join him somewhere else," suggested Conner, as they made their way back toward the automobile.

"No," replied Nick. "They wouldn't do that. They don't trust each other enough for that. Each man in that outfit feels as though all of that stuff should belong to him personally. If we don't overtake them too soon, we will find them fighting over it. At least it would not surprise me if they did. I don't think, by the looks of things, that they have been gone from here more than a couple of hours, if they have that long."

"Fortunately the road is soft, and we will have no difficulty in following their tracks."

The way led them across the covered bridge, and thence to the left and along a road by the bank of a river, where trees grew on either side of them.

After a while they came to another village, which their driver told them was North Londonderry, and daylight was just beginning to make its appearance when they turned a sharp corner around a small hotel and started northward again toward another town five miles away, which they were told would be Weston.

"I think your people are making for Chester—for the other railroad," volunteered their guide. "We will have to stop for gasoline in Weston."

"All right. But get along as fast as you can now. I want to catch them," said Nick.

The pace was necessarily slow, however, for in places there were steep hills; and presently, after going about two miles, they approached a little hamlet, which they were told was known as Weston Island.

And here, just as they were rounding the corner which would take them into the hamlet, the engine stopped, and they knew that the gasoline was exhausted.

"By Jove!" cried Conner. "Have we got to lose that, after all, Nick?"

"No," said Nick. "Come on. There are houses here. We will wake up somebody and hire a pair of horses. Hark! What was that?"

"It sounded to me very much like a pistol-shot," replied Conner. "There is another."

It was another, indeed, and the second one was followed by others in rapid succession, until it amounted to a regular fusillade, all of which proceeded, seemingly, from the top of the hill back of them, and where a very steep road ran up the side of it.

"They could never have taken a car up that hill," said Nick.

"No; but look there!" cried Conner; and he pointed with his finger toward an object that was half-concealed among the bushes near the bottom of the hill.

It was an automobile, now deserted and forsaken.

It had been pushed in among the bushes and left there, abandoned, apparently, altogether.

But everything had been taken out of it. None of the freight of which they were in search could be seen anywhere.

"Come on," shouted Nick, and he started up the hill at a run, closely followed by Conner, and with their friend from Brattleboro making a very good third.

The sounds of pistol-shots that they had heard had died out altogether, and the silence of the mountains was round about them; moreover, the shots had not seemed to disturb any of the residents of the little hamlet that was so near them.

A hundred yards up the hill, Nick Carter, who was in

advance, suddenly rounded a turn in the road, and came to a full stop, too dazed for mere words to express it, by what he saw.

Directly in front of him, lying at full length across the road, was a dead man.

He had fallen upon his face, but even as he laid there Nick thought there was something familiar about his appearance, and, turning him over, he found that it was Mosely.

There was another turn directly ahead of them, and here they found two more men, both alive, although sorely wounded; they were Cockeye and Three-fingers; and then, as they looked a little farther, they saw where the bushes were considerably trampled, and, following this plainly marked path, they came in a moment upon the explanation of it all.

Behind a rock which sheltered it from the roadway, a huge hole had been excavated, and beside the hole was where the boxes had been ripped open and the things torn out of them.

The hole was partly filled in, but some of the papers and other things that had been thrust into it could still be seen.

Beside the hole, with his eyes fixed vacantly upon them as they approached, sitting where he had, somehow, managed to prop himself against a tree, was Dogface.

On his lap in front of him rested a revolver, which he tried in vain to lift in his hands, but which he had not the strength to do.

Nick went over to him and touched him.

"I guess it is all over, Dogface," he said.

"Eh?" replied the man vacantly, and in a weak voice that could hardly be heard at all. "I don't know you. Who are you?"

"I am Nick Carter. You got the goods a little bit ahead of us, but we are here now, as you see. What have you been doing? Trying to murder each other?"

"It was Cockeye that started it. He said there were too many, and he gave it to Mosely good and hard. Then I shot Cockeye, and Three-fingers tried to get me. I let him have it, too, but he winged me after I thought he was dead. Then I crawled back here and tried to finish covering up the stuff, but I hadn't the strength, and now, as you say, it's all up."

"How did you find out that the plates had come here by freight?" asked Nick.

"Mosely met Mrs. Horton on the street. She had returned from Boston. He asked her about it, and she told him how it was sent. Then we started after it."

"You didn't know that I was on the trail, did you?"

"No. We thought it was dead easy. The only man we were afraid of was Selim."

"That same Selim who interviewed you down at the Rookery?"

"Yes. How did you know about that?"

"Because I was Selim on that occasion. Selim was safely taken care of in my house."

"Well, by thunder! I wish we'd 'a' known it then."

"I've no doubt of it."

All this time Nick was binding the man's wound as best he could, while Conner and their friend from Brattleboro were attending to the other two wounded men.

"Our gasoline gave out," said Dogface, "and we couldn't go any farther. So it was agreed between us that we would bury the stuff here for a time and come back after it later. But all the time Mosely had made up his mind that nobody would come back after it but him."

"And hadn't you made up your mind to about the same thing, Dogface?"

"I expect I had. I wanted it all, same as the others."

"Each one of you was bent on killing all three of the others in order to enjoy it all alone, weren't you?"

"It sort of looks that way now. But it's all up. I know that Mosely is dead. Are any of the others likewise?"

"No; you will all live—all except Mosely—to do your terms in prison for this, if you are not sent to the electric chair."

"Well, there are the plates, and the other stuff, anyhow. It has all made trouble enough, and I expect the government deserves to have it now."

* * * * * * *

There was great excitement in the town of Londonderry that day over the unprecedented affair of the plates and bonds; but after the party concerned had departed south, and the body of Mosely had been deposited in an unmarked grave, it quieted down again to the usual tenor of its way.

THE END.

The next number (1588) will be "A Victim of Magic; or, Nick Carter's Struggle with a Human Tiger."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

A traveler once visited Canton with some companions, and, of course, did the sights there.

During their meanderings in the city their cars were assailed with "cumshaw! cumshaw!" yelled by immature possessors of pigtails, and mature possessors echoed the sound wherever they went. When the youngsters' requests were not complied with, they, after a little, invariably changed their cry to *"Fanqui! fanqui!* Foreign devil! foreign devil!"

The invaders marched into the magisterial yamun. Here they were shown the instruments whereby bamboo chow chow is given to the nadal callosities of the wicked, also rattan and short bludgeons for slapping the faces of untruthful witnesses, thumb-screws, and racks for exacting confessions (no criminal can be executed according to the laws of China until he has confessed his crime).

They were next taken in sedan chairs, through an overcrowded, busy part of the city, to the execution-ground. The execution-ground they found to be a small enclosed rectangular space, about fifteen yards by fifty, entered by a gate.

On the right, on entering, ran a row of small squalid houses, the habitations of potters, whose rough, unbaked work lay all about on the ground, drying in the sun, but we were informed that it was cleared away when an execution was about to take place.

Facing the potters' houses was a high wall, at whose base, and leaning against it, were some large crocks, all of which had their mouths earthed over except one. Here their guides introduced them to three poorly dressed Chinamen, whom they noticed gambling at a fan-tan table near the gate on their arrival.

One, a big, brutish-looking fellow, with a villainous cast in one of his eyes, was the head executioner, and the other two, who were smaller men, were his assistants. Through the guide the travelers told the head executioner that they wished to see the instruments of his calling, and thereon he produced a short, very heavy two-handed sword and a long knife. The following conversation was carried on between the strangers and this "boss" through the medium of the guide.

"How do you use this sword? Where is the block?"

"We don't use a block. What we do is to make the prisoners kneel down in two rows, facing one another, and bending their heads down. Then I take the sword, and chop, chop, one on each side, and the heads fall off; so on, till they're all done, as you'd switch the tops off green weeds with your walking-stick."

"But you don't always chop a head off with one blow?"

"Always."

"What is the knife for?"

"For the ling che, or death by many cuts. We tie the culprit who is condemned to this death to that cross there"—pointing to two rough unbarked sticks roughly crossed—"and we commence by cutting off the eyelids, ears, nose and so on, ending by sticking the knife into the heart. The cuts vary from eight to a hundred and twenty, according to the nature of the culprit's crimes."

"What class of criminals are condemned to the ling che?"

"Parricides, matricides, and women who have killed and mutilated their husbands form the majority."

"How many persons have you executed in a day?"

"I have chopped twenty heads off myself in two minutes."

"What is done with the bodies?"

"The friends take the bodies away, but we keep the heads in the crocks over by the wall there, and when we have a large number which are no longer identifiable, we bury them. Would you like to see some of the heads?"

The travelers declined, and one of them began to grow pale and complain of not feeling well, so they ordered the guide to lead them away.

When one receives a letter from South Africa, it might be well to pause and consider through what strange hands and scenes this letter must have gone before it reaches its destination.

At the African end my friend, who lives one hundred miles from a settlement, employed a native runner to carry the letter to the station. This wiry sprinter prepared himself by removing all clothing, rubbing his body afresh with grease, and filling his snuff-box. He takes no other food but snuff for his three days' journey; if he needs anything to eat, he can get it from the native huts. He placed the letter in the split end of a stick to keep it clean, for if it came in contact with the rancid grease on his shining body, all the perfumes of Araby would not make the mail desirable to receive.

Thus equipped, these men run like greyhounds, with little rest and much tobacco, till they finish the trip. While there are no roads in Africa, the whole country is a network of paths between the villages, even through the jungles and forests that have always been looked upon as impassable. These are the African "star routes."

In India letters are carried in nearly the same way, sometimes a number being placed at the end of a stick. The

messengers run through jungles infested with cobras and man-eating tigers. They carry bells, and at night torches.

There was until lately a pony express in China. From the palace at Pekin to the bounds of the empire the emperor's carriers galloped, shouting: "Way for the king's messengers!"

They were begrimed with dust, and their cut and bleeding faces often show what perils they had encountered. The route between Lassa, the capital of Thibet, and Pekin has changes of horses, but not men. One man must ride night and day the three thousand miles' distance. Despatches have been carried in twenty-five days.

The man who is to carry the messages puts on a long robe, in the lining of which are the despatches. The robe is then tied fast and sealed upon the man, and must not be taken off. The messenger rarely eats anything or sleeps; he drinks a little "buttered tea" at stoppings, and smokes opium. This keeps him up till he reaches the imperial city, and receives great honors and large sums of money. No private mail is carried by these messengers.

There are picturesque mail-carriers yet. In the Landes of France, where the ground is marshy, mail-carriers mount on high stilts, and stride across the country as though on seven-league boots. They are not afraid of falling, for they can balance like jugglers; and it looks very quaint to see one doff his cap and hand down a letter to a pretty damsel.

The camel express of India is a gorgeous affair, with trappings of high color on the camel and rider. The camel is a rapid traveler, doing sometimes eighty miles a day; but the jolting is something fearful. It is said to shorten the rider's days.

The bulldog's grip is more tenacious than that of any other animal, and the creature possesses, besides, the distinction of being without a superior in fearlessness. The bulldog, too, is a most devoted and faithful companion, its affection being mainly centered on one person. If the bulldog or its master is attacked, it will fasten on its opponent with a grip which, unless killed or called off by its master, it is exceedingly difficult to loosen.

The pike and king cuttlefish, among fishes, and the eagle and game-cock, among birds, would rank as the most fearless of their respective species. The game-cock is noted for its pugnacity, and is never willing to give up a contest until death has taken one of the combatants.

A full-grown gorilla is as fearless as a tiger, and would never hesitate to attack that animal. African travelers charge the lion with cowardice, and pronounce him to be a pretentious fraud. He will run away like a whipped cur under circumstances in which a tiger will boldly attack and kill.

The Man With the Suit-case.

Herbert Richards slammed the doors of the safes into position for the night with a viciousness which sufficiently indicated the state of his mind. The action was characteristic of all his actions in connection with the business since that eventful day when he had allowed—so his father put it—the hand-bag with its precious contents to be mysteriously appropriated.

He felt that he had been treated harshly over the matter, as if he were some silly boy. It was little fault of his that he should have been victimized on his initial journey by this expert thief; experienced travelers, men who have been carrying diamonds for years, had fallen victims to what was palpably the same skilful hand. And yet his father, who but a short time previously had announced his intention of transferring all the traveling to him, and of giving him a further interest in the business, had, after calling him "numskull," "idiot," and all the pretty names he could lay tongue to, relegated him back to his old position, and himself resumed the journeys.

He turned sharply as he heard the door of the outer office swing open, for it was unusually late for a visitor to Hatton Garden.

"No answer," he said, when he had read the telegram which had caused the intrusion.

"Now I wonder what the dickens this means!" he muttered, staring at the bit of pink paper. "The guv'nor not coming back until the end of the week, and now he sends this wire asking me to meet the four-ten train from Birmingham to Euston. Handed in at New Street Station, too; looks as if he had made up his mind in a hurry. Well, there's nothing for it but to go, and upset all my arrangements for to-night," and he finished his locking up in a less amiable frame of mind than ever.

But his thoughts were destined to be speedily diverted from his personal grievance. "Great di'mond robbery in Berming'am!" yelled the newsboy who raced along as he gained the street, and part of the meaning of that telegram had flashed upon him before he had found the paragraph relating to the latest diamond robbery. Realizing what a severe blow to the financial stability of the firm this second great loss would be, a not unnatural feeling of satisfaction at this peculiarly fitting refutation of his father's scathing epithets was quickly stifled as he read:

"Great diamond robbery in Birmingham. £10,000 worth of stones stolen. A great robbery, which took place in Birmingham this afternoon adds yet another to the series which have baffled the skill of the most experienced detectives in England and on the Continent during the past twelve months. The victim on this occasion is Mr. Richards, diamond-merchant, Hatton Garden, who was paying one of his periodical business visits to the Midland city. Mr. Richards carried his stock, which consisted of loose stones to the value of about £10,000, in a small brief-bag, and it was while he was engaged in the vestibule of the Grand Hotel that this bag disappeared in the most mysterious fashion. Mr. Richards had occasion to place the bag on a chair for a few seconds, and in that short space of time it had vanished as completely as if it had never existed.

"There were several people passing through the vestibule at the time, and something of a scene was created by Mr. Richards excitedly accusing a visitor to the hotel of being the culprit. This gentleman was carrying a peculiar suit-case, and Mr. Richards insisted that he had spirited his bag into its interior. The gentleman was, however, soon able to satisfy the onlookers that such was not the case, and we understand that it is probable that his accuser will hear more of the matter. It is difficult to secure information concerning what actually occurred, the police being very reticent about the affair, probably owing to the fact that Mr. Richards suddenly disappeared immediately after the occurrence. It will be remembered that Mr. Richards' son was victimized in a very similar manner at Manchester only three months ago, and it seems highly probable that this further robbery is the work of the same expert hand."

Herbert Richards crushed the paper in his hand as he moved away toward Euston. "Highly probable!" he muttered bitterly. "It is absolutely certain; and the blackguard must be as quick as lightning. Poor old guv'nor! It will be a fearful blow to his pride. Twenty years on the road without a loss, and now to be done in precisely the same manner as his 'numskull idiot of a son.' But he has not taken this mysterious journey to London without a very strong incentive. It strikes me very forcibly that something is going to happen to-night, and I am to have a hand in it."

The half-hour which preceeded the arrival of the 4:10 from Birmingham seemed a terribly long one to Herbert Richards as he paced the arrival platform at Euston. He was convinced that his father was following up some clue in connection with the robbery, and was burning with impatience to know why he should have himself assumed the rôle of detective rather than have placed the matter in the hands of the police.

As the train drew up his eyes eagerly sought the object of his thoughts; but amid the bustle and confusion he quite failed to notice his father as he emerged from a first-class compartment of a railway-car some distance away. It was not until he felt his shoulder gripped, and heard a voice whisper: "Quick, come with me!" that he was aware of his father's arrival.

There was no thought of greeting between the two men. Herbert quickly realized that his father's attention was centered on the man, with an odd-looking suit-case, who strode through the crowd a few yards ahead, and intuitively he seconded his father's efforts to shadow that individual. It was not until they were seated in a hansom, the driver of which had received instructions to follow and keep in sight a similar vehicle, which was conveying the man with the suit-case to his destination, that Mr. Richards proceeded to enlighten his son as to the reasons for his mysterious behavior.

"I think the fellow told the cabbie Camden Square," he said, in a voice which betrayed his excited state, "so I have plenty of time to tell you the whole story. But, first of all, do you know the man we are following? Was he anywhere about when you lost the stones at Manchester?"

"That is a tall order," answered Herbert. "You forget that I have only had a back view of him. Still, from what I have seen, he is not unlike a man who was walking out of the Manchester post-office at the time I missed my bag from the desk. I don't know that I should say so if he were not carrying an exactly similar suit-case to the man I am thinking of."

"It is the same, without a doubt," said Mr. Richards, with an air of conviction, "and I mean to ransack that suit-case, by hook or by crook, before many hours have passed. But I am getting on too fast. Of course, you have heard of the robbery?"

"Yes," said Herbert gloomily.

"It was all the work of a moment. I will swear that the bag was in my hand ten seconds before I discovered that it had disappeared. There were a good many people passing through the vestibule, leaving the hotel after luncheon; but not one had a bag or anything in which there was the slightest chance of concealing my bag except the gentleman in front of us. I tackled him at once, and, of course, he professed to be very indignant, called on the people round to witness the contents of his suit-case, and rushed off to catch a train, with the threat that he would make me suffer for my insinuations."

"But what was in his suit-case?" interrupted Herbert.

"That is what I mean to find out. What we saw, and what it was apparently filled with, was dirty linen; but it did not take many seconds' thought to convince me that we did not see the whole of the contents. It may seem absurd to suppose that in the space of a few seconds a man could, unobserved, pick up my bag and effectually conceal it beneath the contents of his own; but there cannot possibly be any other solution. I am absolutely certain that nobody could have walked off with my bag in the time without me seeing them, and nobody but this man had any chance of concealing my bag if they had snatched it up."

"Was his suit-case strapped?" asked Herbert suddenly.

"No, but it was locked, and I will admit that that fact is all against my theory. But there is no alternative," he continued doggedly, "and I mean to probe this to the bottom."

"But why not have it placed in the hands of the police?" asked Herbert, who began to think that they were on a fool's errand.

"Seeing how successful they have been in the past," responded his father bitterly, "no; this man would have been lost sight of in the same way that he has been before, for I am certain that it is the same man as the one who worked the trick upon you. I waited for no police, but made a dash for New Street Station, knowing that there was a train at four-ten. As luck would have it—— Ah! here we are."

The cab had pulled up with a jerk at the corner of Camden Square, the practised ear of the driver having caught the sound of the other cab drawing up.

"Just round the corner, sir," said the cabby, in a hoarse

whisper, as he deftly caught the sovereign which Mr. Richards threw up to him.

They were just in time to see the man with the peculiar suit-case disappear into one of a row of dingy, but substantial, houses of the type which are invariably let out in apartments, and a closer inspection revealed the fact that this one was no exception to the rule, for the inevitable card appeared in the ground-floor window. They walked past to a spot where they could command a view of the house, and proceeded to discuss a plan of campaign.

Mr. Richards was for storming the place there and then. "The fellow may be hiding the stones at this very moment," he argued. "A bold policy is the only one to play, and if he shows fight—well, we are two to one, and I have my revolver with me."

"You seem to forget that we are not in California," said Herbert; "and, besides, there will be the deuce to pay if you have mistaken the man, without any violence. No, we must try strategy."

They continued to discuss various possibilities, until suddenly the appearance of the man of whom they were talking caused them to draw farther back into the shadow.

"Now is our chance," said Mr. Richards, as the man disappeared round the corner of the square, and they crossed quickly over to the house.

"We are seeking to change our apartments for something a little quieter," said Mr. Richards to the middle-aged woman who came to the door. "Perhaps you will show us the rooms you have vacant, Mrs.——"

"Mrs. Baker, sir, and there is no quieter house in London than mine," she responded readily. "Come in, gentlemen, and I will show you the first floor back, although I doubt whether they will suit you. Now," she continued, as she led the way up-stairs, "if you could wait another week there will be Mr. Fraser's rooms at the front vacant."

Herbert gripped his father's arm meaningly. This was an unexpected stroke of good fortune.

They inspected the rooms, and pronounced them not quite what they wanted. "Could they see Mr. Fraser's rooms? They were willing to wait for a week if the rooms were suitable."

Mrs. Baker hesitated. Not that her code of honor forbade her taking strangers into a lodger's room in his absence, but the possibility of unpleasant consequences should Mr. Fraser suddenly return arose in her mind. But her anxiety to let the rooms overcame any scruples she may have had.

"Well, gentlemen, it's against my rule, seeing that Mr. Fraser's out, and I can't ask his permission—but I'm sure he'd give it if he was in." And with that she conducted them to the rooms they were so eager to explore.

"This is the sitting-room," said Mrs. Baker, turning up the gas.

Writing-materials and cigarettes on the table were the only indications of Mr. Fraser's tenancy, and Mr. Richards and Herbert exchanged a look of disappointment. But the bedroom yielded a better result. There, just as it had apparently been dropped by its owner on his return from Birmingham, lay the suit-case.

Mrs. Baker's garrulous description of the advantages of her first floor front suddenly ceased as she observed Mr. Richards struggling with the fastenings of her lodger's suit-case, and it required all Herbert's persuasive powers to prevent her from screaming for the police.

"Have you your keys with you, Herbert?" cried Mr. Richards, perspiration bathing his forehead.

But the lock refused to respond to Herbert's keys, as it had done to his own, and he started to wrench and tear at the fastenings in desperate fashion, urged on by the possible imminence of Mr. Fraser's return.

"Herbert," he cried, abandoning his efforts in despair, "you are younger and stronger than I am. Get the thing open if you have to tear it to pieces."

Herbert set to work with a will, but still the fastenings refused to give.

"What fools we are not to have thought of cutting it open," suddenly cried Mr. Richards, taking a knife from his pocket. But even as he spoke there was a sharp click and a thud—and the missing bag lay on the floor at their feet.

For a moment they stared in speechless amazement. The portmanteau was still locked, and yet the bag had fallen from its interior!

The sound of some one entering the sitting-room quickly brought Mr. Richards to a realization that the struggle for the diamonds was not yet over, and Mrs. Baker gave vent to a hysterical scream as he covered the doorway with his revolver.

"Quick, Herbert, the bag!" cried his father, as Mr. Fraser appeared in the doorway. But Herbert had already grasped the situation, and was backing across the room with the bag in his hand.

For one moment the expert thief, whose coolness and resource were being talked of all over the country, stood confounded; then a flash of recognition crossed his face as he looked from Herbert to Mr. Richards, and his hand went to his pocket. But whether it was the fact that his opponents were two to one, or that Mrs. Baker's screams were likely to bring assistance which might have resulted in his capture, can only be surmised. Whatever the reason, it was with characteristic speed that he adopted the safer course of action before either Mr. Richards or Herbert had realized that he had relinquished his booty without a struggle.

The police are still anxious to make the acquaintance of the owner of a remarkable suit-case which now figures in the Scotland Yard museum. An examination of its construction renders Mr. "Fraser's" methods obvious. To the casual observer it reveals no special features, but a closer inspection discloses the fact that the dirty linen which apparently constitutes its contents rests on a false foundation, leaving a space behind for the reception of the spoil. The back of the suit-case is divided along the center, an overlapping rib covering the dividing-line. By means of an ingenious mechanism these halves are made to travel into the interior in response to the movement of a lever concealed in the frame near to the handle, and are snapped back into position by the action of a series of springs on the lever being released.

To cover Mr. Richards' small bag and gather it within this ingeniously contrived compartment would be but the work of a second for the expert Mr. "Fraser," just as was the accidental pulling of the lever by Mr. Herbert Richards, which restored not only the purloined diamonds, but his father's pride and his own enhanced position in the firm—for, although Mr. "Fraser" is still at large, Mr. Richards has every confidence that it will go hard for "the man with the suit-case" should he try to victimize his son a second time.

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